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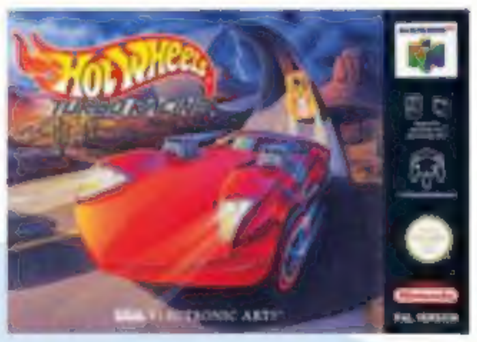

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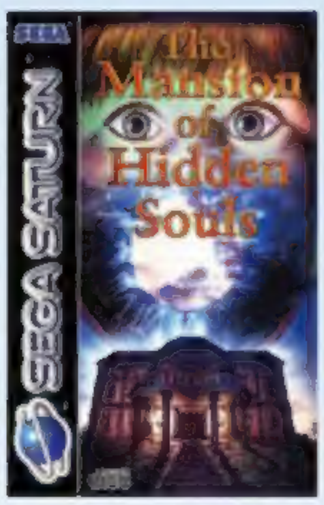

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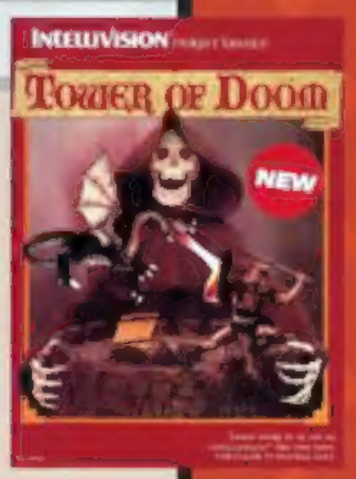

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LOADING...

If you're a long-term reader of Retro Gamer then you may well remember from issue 44 that my first experience of id Software's game was seeing it running on a friend's 486. It left an instant impression on me, which was soured somewhat when I later picked up the Sega Saturn version and realised it wasn't a patch on the PlayStation port that was also available (or the PC original, for that matter).

Doom's impact on the industry has been huge, both in terms of how it has helped shape the first-person shooter genre and the industry in general. It was one of the many games that bridged generations and bought gaming to the attention of everyone (even my non-gaming friends know what *Doom* is) and it remains as fun to play today as it did in 1993. It's a real honour, then, to speak to creators like John Romero and Tom Hall, as well as those who have been influenced either directly or indirectly by id Software's magnificent shooter.

But don't worry if *Doom* doesn't appeal to you, you should find plenty in this issue that does, from a big article on *Link's Awakening* and cyberpunk games to behind-the-scenes looks at *Amstrad Action*, *The Ninja Saviors* and *Gauntlet: The Deeper Dungeons*.

Enjoy the magazine!

THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE MEMORY OF DOOM?

DARRAN JONES

Playing the PlayStation version with my brother and marvelling at how atmospheric the soundtrack was.

Expertise:
Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls and an award-winning magazine

Currently playing:
Astral Chain

Favourite game of all time:
Strider

DREW SLEEP

I used to be in awe at how Doomguy's portrait would accumulate wounds as you took damage from the demons. I was easily amused as a child.

Expertise:
Teaching Darran millennial [I am so 'woke' right now - Ed]

Currently playing:
Astral Chain

Favourite game of all time:
Final Fantasy VIII

NICK THORPE

My favourite bit of *Doom* is the sweet relief that hits once I've stopped playing it for a while, the vomit bucket has been cleaned and the motion sickness has subsided. Just me?

Expertise:
Owning five Master Systems (I sold two)

Currently playing:
Tetris 99

Favourite game of all time:
Sonic The Hedgehog

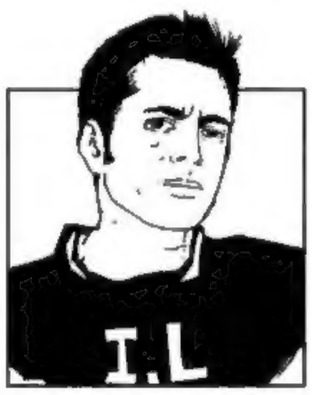
ANDY SALTER

Playing on my Sega 32X and thinking it was the greatest game ever. I was amazed that a console, admittedly one with an expensive hardware upgrade, could run a PC game.

Expertise:
Modding games, no 'vanilla' versions for me, thanks!

Currently playing:
Kenshi

Favourite game of all time:
Rome: Total War



IAIN LEE

Doom made me motion sick, but I could not put it down. Genuinely terrifying and annoying, just like a game should be.

Expertise:
Buying overpriced stuff on eBay then never touching it

Currently playing:
PUBG

Favourite game of all time:
Elite (BBC Model B)

PAUL DRURY

I've always loved games where you can shoot while running away, and like *Juno First* before it and *Serious Sam* after it, *Doom* let me back off with my guns blazing.

Expertise:
The Way Of The Rodent

Currently playing:
Man Of Medan

Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space

PAUL WALKER-EMIG

Hearing the growls and groans of unseen monsters was terrifying at the time, especially when it heralded one of those pink bastards suddenly charging at you.

Expertise:
Pretentious indie games

Currently playing:
Ape Out

Favourite game of all time:
Metal Gear Solid

LUKE ALBIGÉS

Firing the BFG for the first time. "What does this thing do? Oh. *OH!*"

Expertise:
Unstoppable *Bomberman* player and real-life *Guitar Hero*

Currently playing:
Monster Hunter World: Iceborne

Favourite game of all time:
Micro Machines 2: Turbo Tournament

RORY MILNE

Intense firefights and stealth sniping are good answers, but it's *Doom*'s superlative level design that facilitates its unapologetic celebration of violence.

Expertise:
The game that I'm writing about at the time of writing

Currently playing:
The Sentinel

Favourite game of all time:
Tempest

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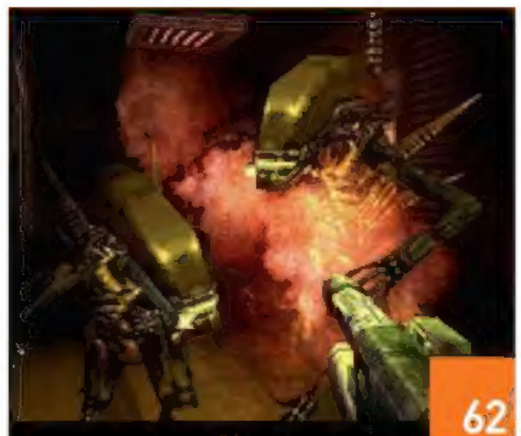

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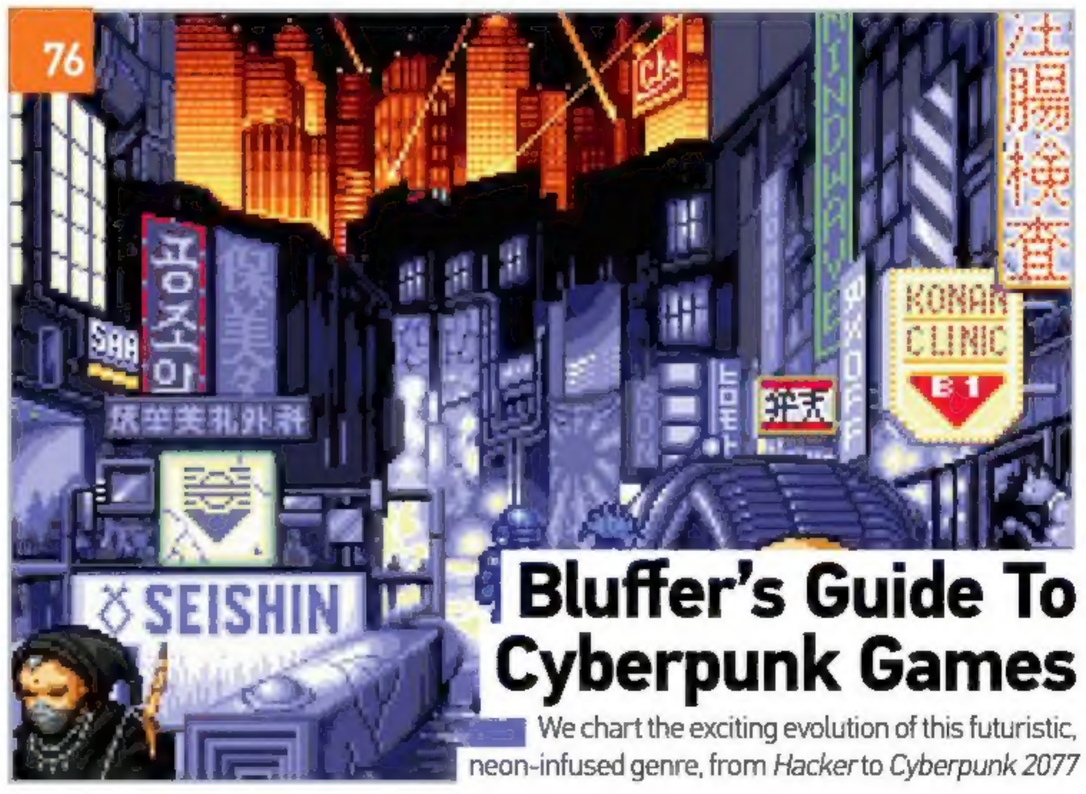

Bluffer's Guide To Cyberpunk Games

We chart the exciting evolution of this futuristic, neon-infused genre, from *Hacker* to *Cyberpunk 2077*

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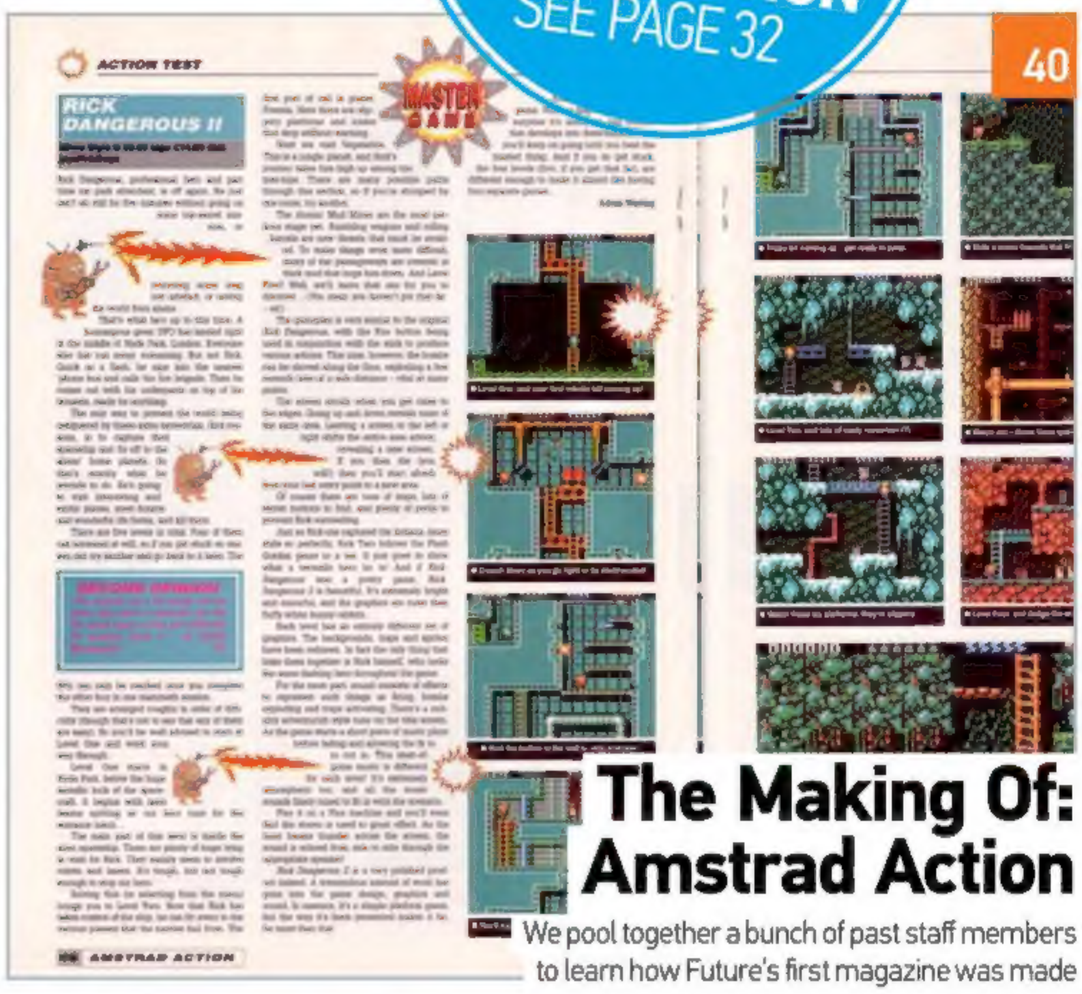

The Making Of: Amstrad Action

We pool together a bunch of past staff members to learn how Future's first magazine was made

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Nick's concludes another issue of the magazine with a forgotten Amiga game

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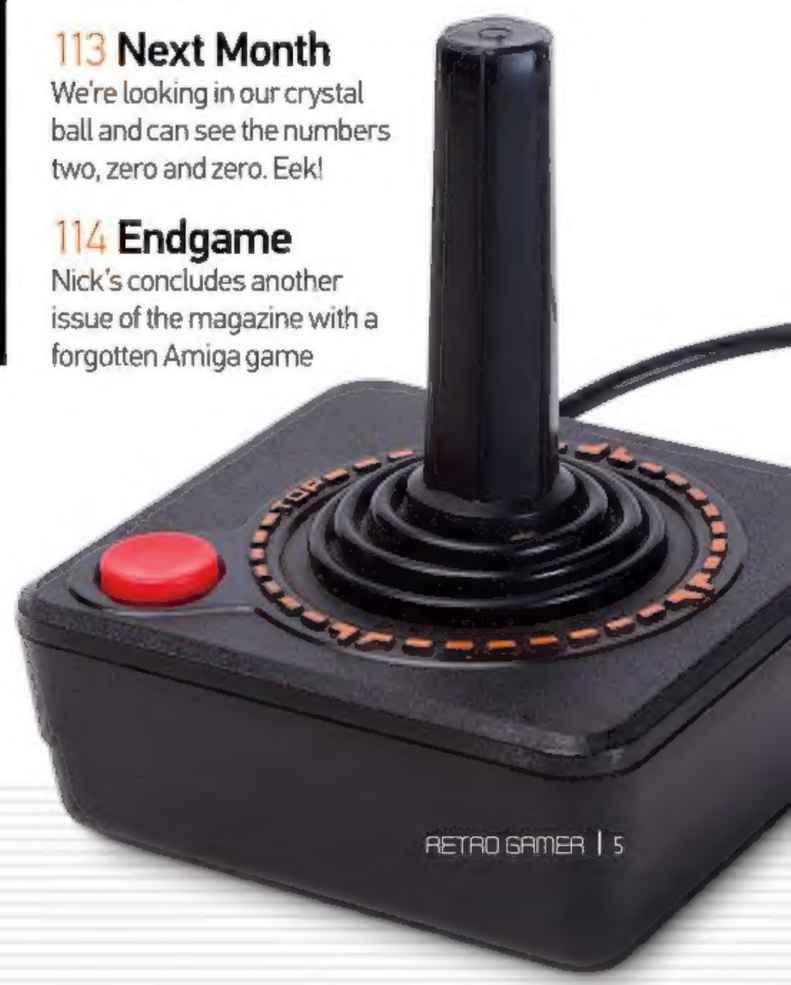
Ultimate Guide: The Legend Of Zelda: Link's Awakening

With the remake now available, it's the perfect time to revisit Link's greatest portable adventure



TRIPPING THE LIGHT FANTASTIC

Paul Docherty on his upcoming Jeff Minter documentary

» *Heart Of Neon* is currently on Kickstarter. Find it at bit.ly/heartofneon.

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Nick's time machine has touched down, and he's landed in November 2002

Jeff Minter remains one of the most interesting developers still working in the industry today. Despite his prolific career, he remains on the outskirts of the industry, happy to do his own thing and make the games he wants to play. He's now the subject of a fascinating new documentary called *Heart Of Neon*. We caught up with its director, Paul Docherty, to find out how the project came to be.

You started off as a game artist, why did you move into TV/film?
It was the product of coinciding circumstances. In the early Nineties I moved to the US at the same time that the videogames industry was consolidating talent into large teams in bullpen offices, and I was faced with the prospect of moving my family away from our home in rural New Hampshire because I wasn't getting employed as a freelance artist anymore. So I worked in other fields for a while before studying film at a New England college as a career change, and through that course I got an internship with Florentine Films, and that became my career trajectory.

» The documentary will focus on the entirety of Jeff Minter's lengthy career.

Why focus on Jeff Minter?
I'd been looking for a videogame-related subject because I still had that history with the medium from the Eighties and Noughties. Jeff's name came up in conversation one day, and it was suggested I should make a film about him. I sort of shrugged that off at the time, saying, 'Yes that's a great idea, but we live 3,000 miles apart, which is a bit of a handicap.' But the more I thought about it, and then the more I read about the details of his career, the more I realised this is exactly the story I was to tell – an independent artist with a singular vision who has no interest in being mainstream, who should by rights been relegated to the 'where are they now?' file if not for this force of will, this determination to never give up, to always find a way. Jeff Minter has seen indie game development come in and out of style more than once, and he rose above regardless. And he did it by being himself. That's a story.

So how did you get the ball rolling?
We have a mutual friend in Gary Liddon, who I used to work with in London in the late Eighties/early Nineties. It was Gary who suggested it, truth be told. I liked the idea, but it felt too hard to execute logistically. I got in touch with Gaz to put me in touch with Jeff, and soon after a Skype conversation happened between me and Jeff, and we came to an agreement that day. It took a while to find the right time for the first interview session, *Polybius* was taking up a lot of Jeff's and Giles' attentions, and, frankly, I didn't want to distract them, but really once I decided this is what I wanted to do, it came together quite organically.

What sort of access have you had to Jeff, as he comes across as quite private?
Jeff and Giles have invited me to visit their farm a couple of times now, and I

» Paul has been allowed to follow Jeff at various expos, and has collated hours of footage.

» Paul Docherty worked in videogames as an artist before moving into TV and film.

» That's exactly the sort of psychedelic opening we would expect for a documentary all about Jeff Minter.

» You can expect Jeff's many animals to appear in the documentary, too, as they're a large part of his life.

» Jeff and Giles have given Paul unprecedented access, all the better for following Jeff's career.

have shadowed them at a couple of Play Expo events. I have been delighted with whatever access Jeff and Giles have felt comfortable with. They are both gracious hosts, and have been very patient with me. There's nothing more unnatural and intrusive as a guy following you around with a camera barking questions. I tried to make it painless, but it's still a camera in your face.

How are you going about funding the project?

I self-funded the first stage of development and production myself. The post-production phase has now started and there are several paths to exhibition I can take to get the film to the widest possible audience. The path that I'm pursuing right now is a Kickstarter crowdfunding campaign. I like this format because I get to interact with Jeff Minter's fans and, with them, help educate a potential new audience for Jeff through the campaign itself, as well as through Twitch events and Instagram stories and other online sharing opportunities. I really just wanted to throw Jeff a party and invite the world, as dippy as that sounds. The more I got involved in the Llamasoft story, the more invested I became. So this Kickstarter campaign is sort of an expression of that. An Oxtravaganza! Succeed or fail, at the end of this campaign I don't think anyone will be in any doubt where I stand on the subject of Jeff Minter and Llamasoft. [You can find the campaign at bit.ly/heartofneon.]

"I want to make a film about an artist that will stand the test of time"

Paul Docherty

What are you hoping to achieve with *Heart Of Neon*?

I want to make a film that demystifies the game design process in a way that's engaging and accessible to people who don't really care about this insider kind of stuff. I want to make a film about an artist that will stand the test of time. I want Jeff to get an OBE, or failing that, I want Jeff to have the kind of support where it's not such a struggle all the time to make his art. It's what any artist would want for themselves or for someone they admire. ★

retro radar THE VAULT

THE COOL RETRO STUFF THAT WE'VE HAD OUR EYE ON THIS MONTH

Neo-Geo Mini Samurai Shodown Haohmaru Edition

SNK latest mini console comes in four distinct translucent styles: a black Kuroko, a blue Ukyo Tachibana, a red Nakoruru and the white Haohmaru shown here.

It's essentially the exact same mini system that was first released last year, but it now includes two controllers, a HDMI cable and a USB power lead to explain the higher price point. Additionally, the 40 available games have been suitably mixed up, and the big draw here is that all six *Samurai Shodown* games that were released for the Neo-Geo have been included.

Price: £140
From: amazon.co.uk

Return Of The Borders

The third volume of Marco A Breddin's series is business as usual. As a result, you get some interesting insight into the Atari demo scene, plenty of information about some of the biggest demos, including *Lost Blubb*, *Obnoxious* and *Dream Dimension*, essential games that include the likes of *Super Burnout*, *Obsession* and *Stardust*, as well as a host of interesting features. The best section by far focuses on a selection of interviews, which give fascinating insight on the coders that keep the Atari dream alive.

Price: €39.90
From: microzeit.com

Pac-Man Puzzle Mazes

This engaging puzzle book is themed beautifully and features four distinct types of puzzles. 'Shortest Route' requires you to score a set amount of points in the fewest amount of moves, 'Ghost Hunt' adds ghosts to be hunted down, 'High Score' requires you to get the highest score possible, while 'One Of Each' has you gobbling down each of the items found in the maze in question. There's a great balance of different difficulties across the 100 puzzles and some of them even run across two pages, making them even more challenging. Luckily, solutions are included if you get stuck. The end result is a really novel take on Namco's iconic figurehead.

Price: £9.99
From: amazon.co.uk

PICK OF THE MONTH

Retro Gaming: A Byte-Sized History Of Video Games

It's a brave move to cram 30 years of history into less than 200 pages. Nevertheless, *Retro Gaming* is a fun little read that offers a brief snapshot into some of the biggest games and systems from that period. All the main bases are covered with things kicking off with the release of *Pong* and finishing on the sixth generation of consoles, and games such as *Resident Evil 4* and *Halo: Combat Evolved*. There are some nice little surprises along the way (did you know the block shapes in *Tetris* have nicknames?) and its structure makes for light easy reading.

Price: £12.99 (£5.99 Kindle)
From: amazon.co.uk

Ultimate 90s Retro Gaming Collection

Our latest book looks at everything that made Nineties gaming so special, from the best games for systems like the PlayStation, Super Nintendo and Mega Drive, to behind-the-scenes looks at the likes of *Tomb Raider*, *Tekken* and *NBA Jam*. We explore the history of big franchises like *Alien Breed*, *Banjo-Kazooie* and *Road Rash*, and dive deep into the likes of *NiGHTS: Into Dreams*, *Lemmings* and *Desert Strike*. It's an essential read for anyone that loved gaming's raddest decade and is the perfect companion to our *80s Retro Gaming Collection*.

Price: £9.99
From: myfavouritemagazines.co.uk

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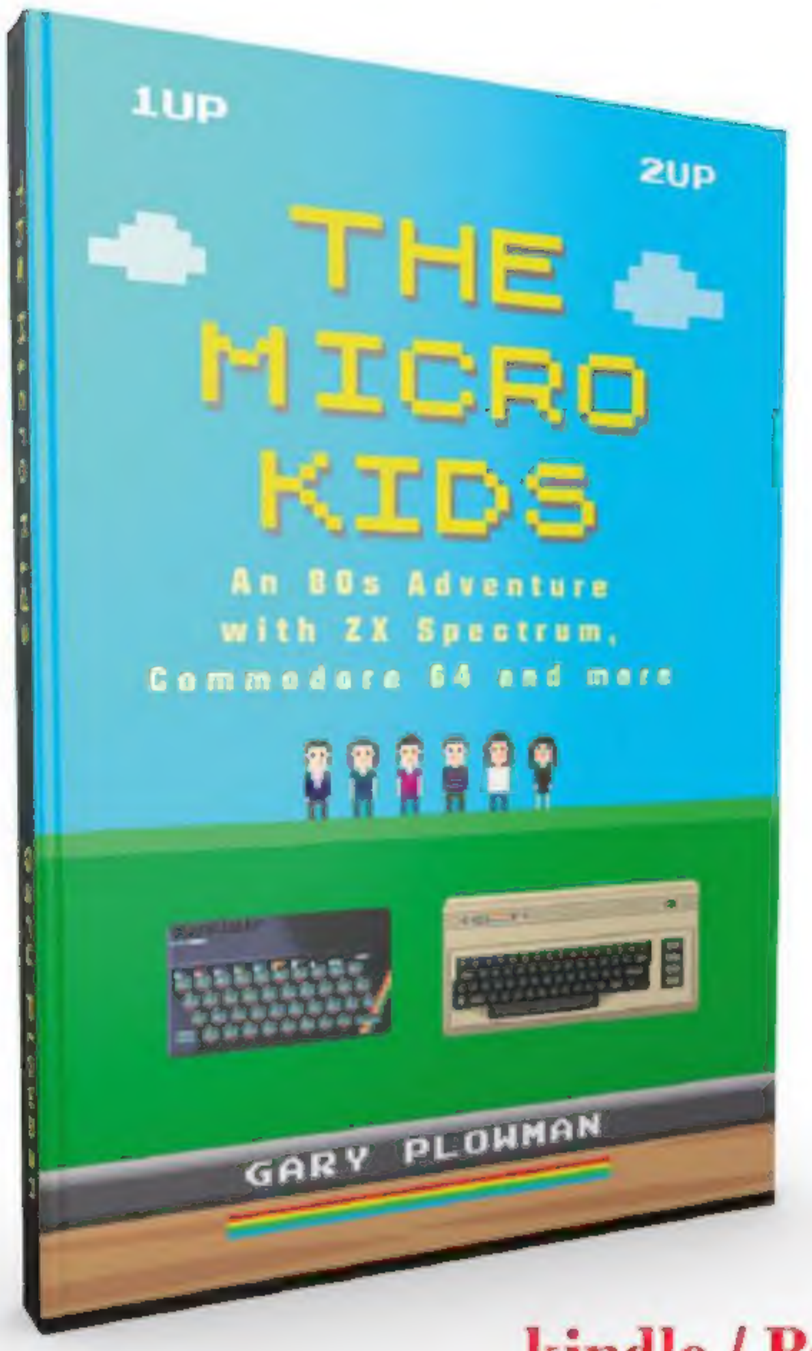

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– Indie Retro Games

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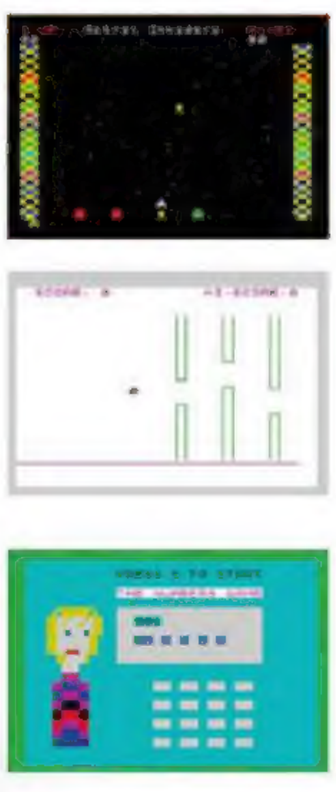

Who is Iain Lee?
Iain Lee is a freelance broadcaster who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. He currently hosts *The Late Night Alternative* show at weekdays from 10pm on www.talkradio.co.uk and runs daily retro streams on www.twitch.tv/iainlee.

I wanted to make millions!

I may have told you this before, but I wanted to be a computer programmer. I would have been nine years old and I decided I was going to get rich by writing some games and then selling them. That was the plan. Write games. Sell them. Get rich.

The problem was I couldn't really program computers at that point *and* there wasn't a huge market for Dragon 32 software: the machine I was rocking at that point. In fact, I never really got good at writing software. My highlight was something that converted Centigrade into Fahrenheit. I was really proud of that.

Oh, and I was the idiot that would stand in Boots or WHSmith or John Menzies and write quizzes. Mum would drop me off in the shop for three hours while she did mum stuff on a Saturday, and if no games were loaded up (evil shopkeepers would do that sometimes to stop their computer department looking like an arcade) to fill the void I would write quizzes. This was actually pretty sophisticated stuff. The program would start off by asking you your name (something to do with $trings, wasn't it?) and it would then call you by your name as it asked each question. Once completed, I would stand back and watch as people played my humble little game. It was a genuine thrill.

Anyway, that was some time off. My plan to make millions was even more niche than I've described. Because instead of it just being really successful and popular games I was going to somehow write, I was going to make them EDUCATIONAL! The word every sensible gamer in the Eighties hated. 'Oh I bought you this because it's *educational*!' Thanks for nothing, mum.

I was a proper little bumlick. I never got as far as sitting down and starting the old 10 PRINT, "Welcome to Iain's EDUCATIONAL game". No, I was sensible and made sure I got my priorities right. I, of course, started by designing the cover of the cassette. Now that was easy. I had some blank paper (I've literally just this second remembered that it was a pale green, no idea why, but it was) and I carefully cut and folded it into a tape inlay shape. I then drew Humpty Dumpty on there and wrote some kind of awful poem/slogan for the company. This was nearly 40 years ago, so my memory is a little foggy, but it went something like...

Humpty Dumpty had a great fall
Humpty Dumpty went to school
And he learned everything he needed to
On his Dragon 32

Actually, that isn't as bad as I thought it was going to be. Alright... it's awful. Give me a break, I was a confused kid.

But that's as far as it got. I never did any others, and certainly never made my millions. You know, I don't think I have ever told anyone about this. I feel a little embarrassed sharing it now, but I bet a load of you did exactly the same? If you did, do drop me a line and let me know, and maybe in the future I'll write a little rundown of the best/worst games that you lot never made. I'm on iain@iainlee.com.

> "I would stand back and watch as people played my humble little game"

Do you agree with Iain's thoughts? Contact us at:

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Who is Paul Rose?
Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of *Digitizer The Show* at www.bit.ly/briffo2000.

Backlog blues

I had this dream once. No, hang on – I'm not going all Martin Luther King on you. It was a dream in which one of the Kardashians – specifically Koko Kardashian, who I have only since discovered isn't actually a 'real' Kardashian – got stuck going down a slide at the park. Not one of those open slides, but one of the ones that are enclosed, like a tube. The solution? Feed more Kardashians down the slide in an attempt to dislodge her.

This dream has stuck with me for years, because a) it's so bizarre (and my subconscious clearly ripped it off an episode of *The Simpsons*), and b) because, well, it made me laugh. Nonetheless, if you take it as a metaphor, it's a good one for lots of things in life. There's so much I've wanted to do that I've never gotten around to, and yet more and more stuff keeps coming along which means I'll probably never clear the slide. Take games, for example. I've got so many I've never gotten around to playing. There are really important, significant games that I rather guiltily feel I should've completed. Some I've only dipped into, and others I've not even touched.

Let's look at the *Zelda* games. My entire experience of them are those brief bits in the *WarioWare* games. I've only played about two of the 50-odd *Final Fantasy* games. I barely scratched the surface of the original *Elite*. *Chrono Trigger* and *Parasite Eve* I seem to know nothing about. *Snatcher* I think I have played... but most of what I remember about it seems to come from articles I've read over the years.

Perhaps the most shocking admission is that I've never played any of the *Monkey Island* games. Somehow, through osmosis, I know all the jokes, but it's weird that they somehow passed me by, given that I love LucasArts' adventures.

There isn't even the excuse that I wasn't able to play these games because I didn't own their host format – all of them were available to me. Furthermore, they're all pretty much available now in re-released or emulated form.

Thing is, it's like missing a turning for motorway services when you really need the toilet; it's behind me now. Do I keep going to the next exit, then head back, or do I keep on going until the next services?

There are more new games being released all the time – more and more Kardashians being punted down the slide – and they tend to get my attention. My retro gaming, for the most part, tends to be nostalgia-led; I want to play things I remember and enjoy a warm, musty embrace of familiar sights and sounds. And yet, as time goes on, even modern games seem to pass by before I've had the chance to so much as call out for them to wait for me, I watch inevitably as they recede into the rearview mirror. I feel the pressure of it, a weight of history, of missed opportunities, building up behind me.

Koko! Stop kicking me in the back! ★

Do you agree with Paul's thoughts? Contact us at:

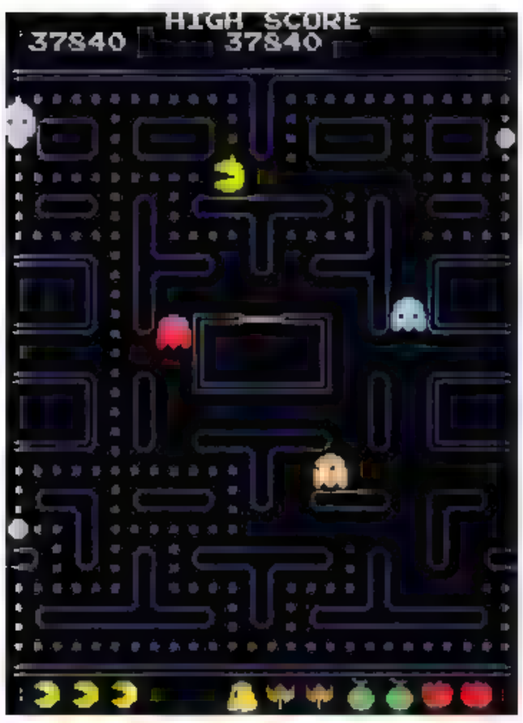
RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

An open book

David L Craddock shares his love of arcade conversions with us

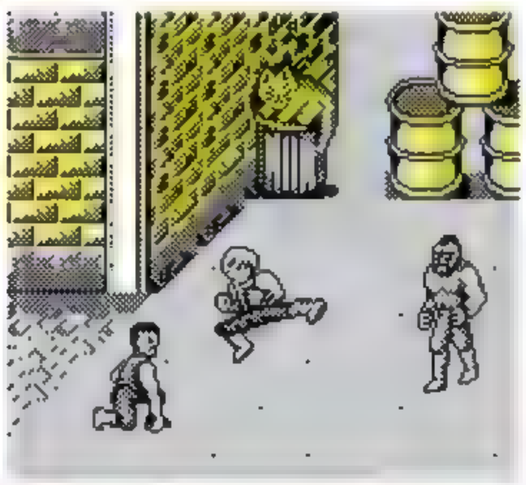
In his latest book, *Arcade Perfect: How Pac-Man, Mortal Kombat, And Other Coin-Op Classics Invaded the Living Room*, author David L Craddock reports the fascinating stories behind the cuts and compromises that led to impressive arcade games running on puny home consoles. We caught up with the author to find out a little more about his brand-new tome.

Why did you decide to write *Arcade Perfect*?
As a kid I loved arcade games, but I loved home ports even more. I was fascinated by the differences – 'Why are the characters smaller? Why are the backgrounds different? Why does the Genesis version of *Mortal Kombat* have blood, but my SNES version doesn't?' – and decided to track down their devs and find out what was involved in bringing arcade games home.



We enjoyed reading about developers devising ingenious tricks and hacks to get games running on underpowered hardware. What's your favourite example of that kind of technique?
My favourite hacks were things us consumers would never think of because we lack a fundamental understanding of how the tech worked, such as [*Pac-Man* porter] Tod Frye switching background 'lines' on and off to simulate players eating pellets. *Marble Madness*, a complex game that was simplified several times just to get it running on arcade hardware, was scaled down even further for NES, which used 'almost but not quite' maths to calculate collision detection.

What challenges do you face writing books like *Arcade Perfect*?
The toughest part about writing *Arcade Perfect* is finding developers who made a game 20-plus years ago. Some developers, such as Keith Burkhill (*MK1* and *MK2* on Game Gear, *SF Alpha 3* on GBA) no longer work in the industry, others may not have much of a presence online. It's a challenge I run into often, given that most of my books deal with older games, and finding people hasn't gotten any easier.



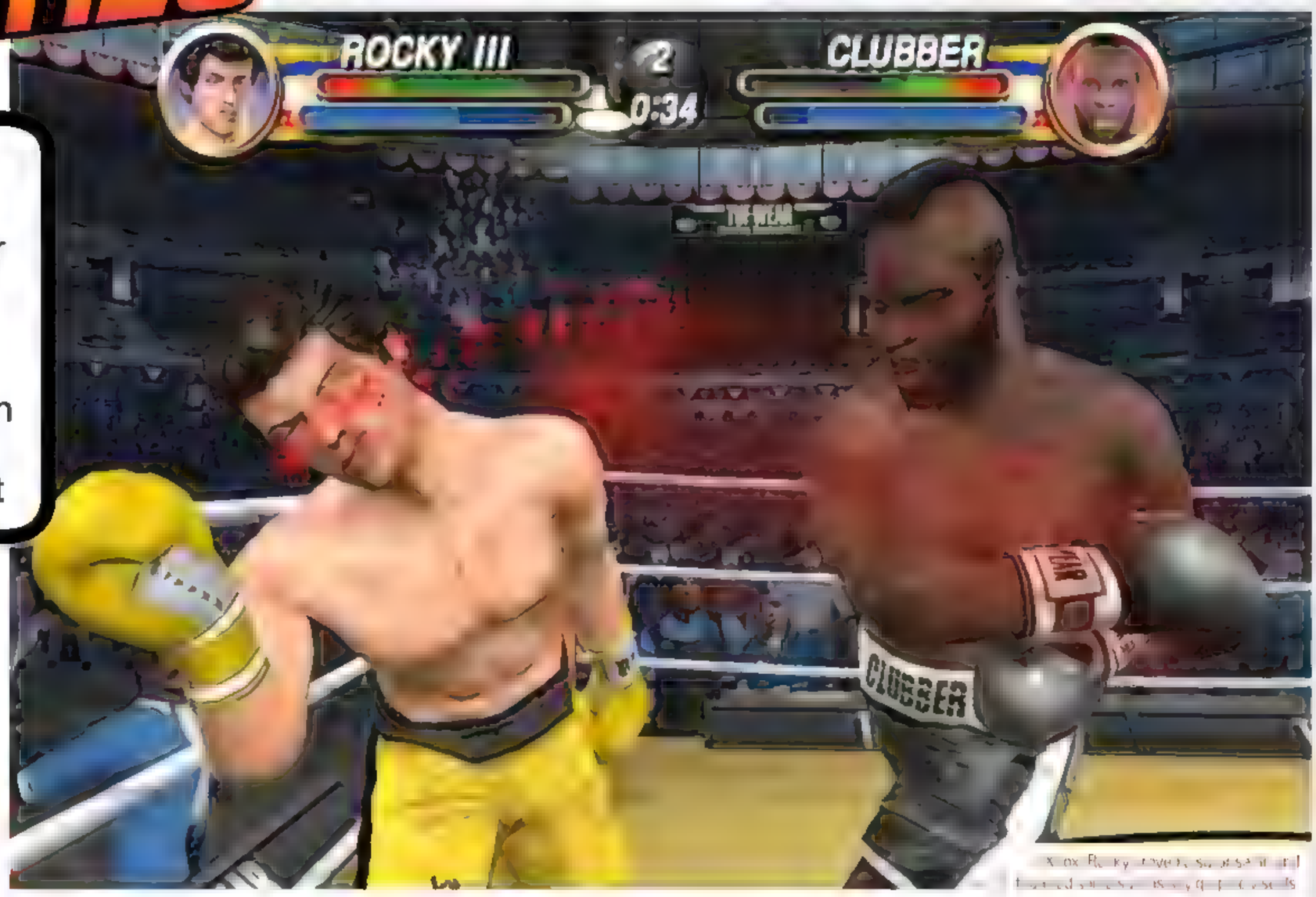
There's a common thread in the book of developers working really hard to get an arcade game working on underpowered hardware only for it to be met with negative critical response. Was that part of the draw for you?
Oh, absolutely. Everyone rightfully views Ed Boon and John Tobias as the two figureheads of *Mortal Kombat*, but the home conversions, vastly outsold those arcade cabinets. Original creators are more well known, so I wanted to go deeper into the proverbial coal mine to see who had to do all the shovelling from veins that had been tapped

You've written a lot about developer crunch. Do you think it's getting any better?
Unfortunately, crunch – also known as 'the death march' – seems ubiquitous with game development, and with nearly all creative endeavours. It's a double-edged sword. While interviewing for my *Stay Awhile And Listen* books, *Diablo II*'s developers confided that without crunch, many core features, such as hiring mercenaries, wouldn't have been created. I think the key is either moderating work hours – studies have shown that most people do more harm than good after 40-plus hours in a single week anyway – or, better yet, compensating teams for the extra time.

Are you excited by the opportunity to study the ways devs get games running on modern hardware like the Nintendo Switch?
Ports of multiplatform games on lower-end hardware have definitely taken the place of arcade-to-home conversions as one of my favourite areas of interest. *Doom* (2016) on Switch, for example, shaved off nearly every frill in order to preserve the game's core attraction: ripping and tearing through demons without so much as a framerate hiccup. That's what I love: learning how developers zero in on the beating heart of a game, then determine how to transplant that heart to another body. ★

***Arcade Perfect* is available now from Amazon in paperback form or on Kindle.**

BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES



NOVEMBER 2002 – We finally have some positive Nintendo news, it's another good month for Eighties movie licences and it's an extraordinary month for Dreamcast owners. What in the heck is going on? Nick Thorpe finds out

NEWS NOVEMBER 2002

On 7 November, Gibraltar voted to reject the proposal of Britain and Spain sharing sovereignty over the territory. The prospect of such an arrangement had been raised by British foreign secretary Jack Straw in July, following secret talks with Spain, but was subject to a referendum. The government of Gibraltar swiftly organised its own, which attracted an 87.9 per cent turnout and a 98.97 per cent landslide 'no' vote, rendering joint sovereignty a dead end

The oil tanker MV Prestige suffered critical damage in a winter storm on 13 November, off the Costa De La Muerte in the north west of Spain. The vessel had serious structural deficiencies that had been identified prior to leaving port, and a 50-foot hole was torn in the starboard side of the vessel The ship sank 130 miles from the Spanish coast on 19 November, spilling over 64 million litres of oil in Spain's worst ecological disaster.

American philosopher John Rawls passed away on 24 November, at the age of 81. He became best known for his 1971 book *A Theory Of Justice*, which drew upon and modernised the social contract theory. John Rawls has been considered one of the most influential political philosophers of the 20th Century, and received the National Humanities Medal from US President Bill Clinton in 1999.

THE LATEST NEWS FROM NOVEMBER 2002

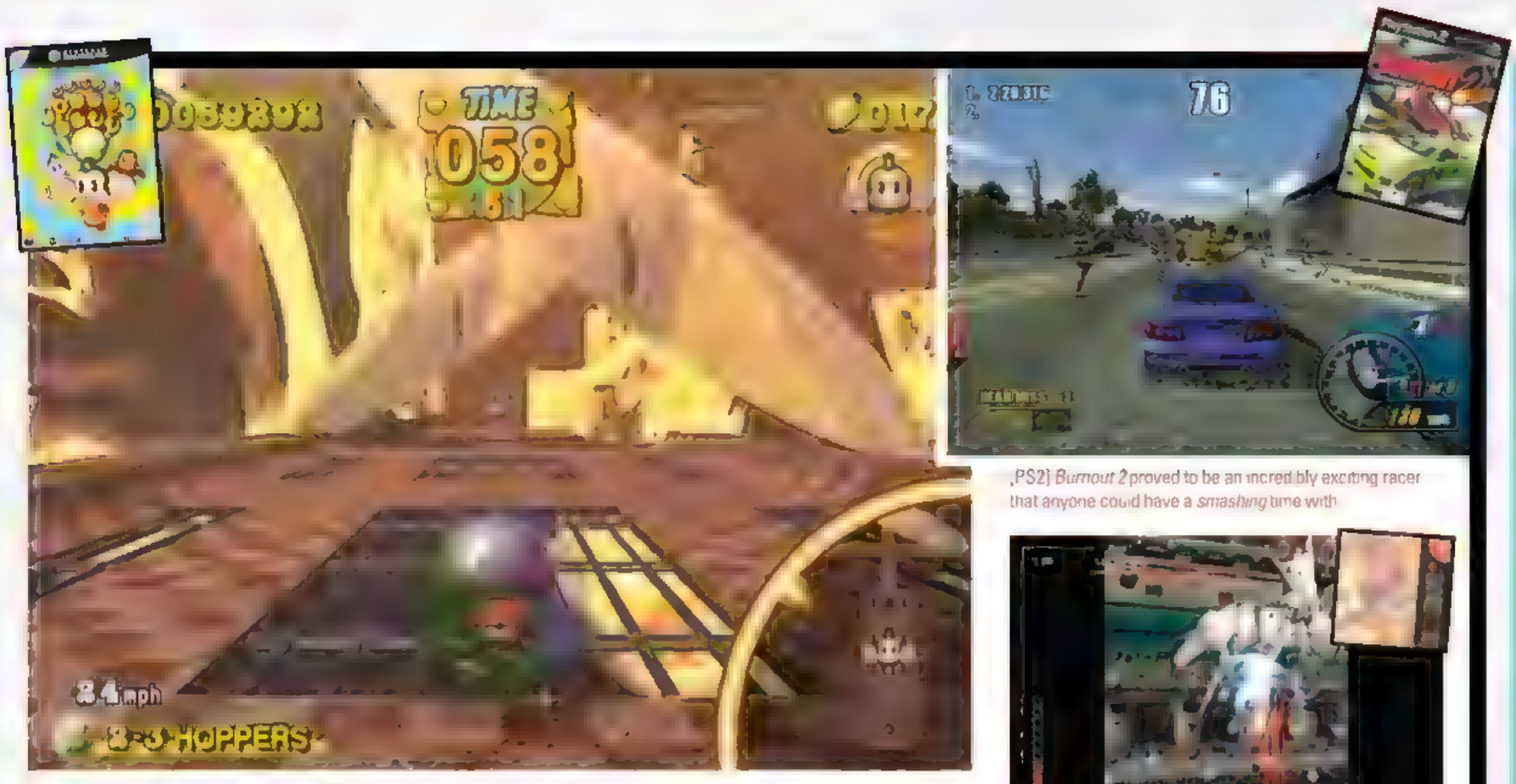
The Game Boy Advance had certainly proven popular since its introduction in early 2001, but *Edge* reported that a new iteration of the machine could be hitting Japanese stores before the end of the year. The magazine said that the device would be a significant change from the previous model, featuring a folding body, a backlit screen and an integrated rechargeable battery. The company was also reportedly planning to improve the ARM CPU and possibly add extra RAM, as well as two extra face buttons to match the control layout of the SNES. The magazine also suggested an introductory price below ¥10,000 – an astonishing achievement, if true. While some of these proposed improvements were certainly welcome (the improved display in particular), the prospect of an upgraded machine with extra buttons could only be upsetting to existing users given the relatively recent release of the original model.

PC gamers had a couple of big hitters this month. First-person shooter sequel *Unreal Tournament 2003* was given a world exclusive review in *PC Gamer*, and scored 91%. Reviewer Jim Rossignol felt that the game "manages to create a healthy amalgam of intuitive design, stunning visuals and a comfortably familiar dynamic", but did note a lack of innovation. *Battlefield 1942* from Digital Illusions scored 88% in *PC Gamer* and 7/10 in *Edge*, with the latter calling it an "awe-inspiring and endlessly varied multiplayer experience", but worrying that "the maps might end up being a little empty" due to a small European community. *Gridrunner++*, Jeff Minter's latest blaster, scored 87% in *PC Gamer* too, with Kieron Gillen's plea to players being, "Play the thing. Buy the thing It's only a fiver."

The game that had the biggest impact on PS2 this month was *Burnout 2: Point Of Impact*, which scored 93% in *Play*. The game was considered to have addressed all the flaws of its predecessor and built on its strengths, with the reviewer noting, "It's always a good sign when jaded videogame journalists are arguing about who gets the next go." *Edge* scored the game 8/10, describing it as "the perfect embodiment of the 'bigger, better,

PC It was pleasing to see that *Battlefield 1942* was a multiplayer hit

PC You didn't need to hold a degree at Oxford to appreciate the genius of *Unreal Tournament 2003*



[GameCube] In a sparse month for Nintendo fans, *Super Monkey Ball 2* was easily the *hottest* game

more' sequel mentality". It also received 8/10 in *Official PlayStation 2 Magazine*, where reviewer Oliver Hurley praised its "instantly gratifying, super-speedy, thrill-soaked arcade raceage" and called it "the anti *Gran Turismo*". PS2 owners who weren't up for that had other options though, including *Riding Spirits* (77% *Play*, 7/10 *Official PS2*), *NHL 2003* (87% *Play*, 7/10 *Official PS2*), *Sub Rebellion* (74% *Play*, 4/10 *Official PS2*), *Taz Wanted* (76% *Play*, 5/10 *Official PS2*) and *Way Of The Samurai* (78% *Play*, 6/10 *Edge*, 5/10 *Official PS2*)

Super Monkey Ball 2 rolled out on the GameCube this month, and received high praise. *Edge* scored the game 8/10, praising the new minigames but noting that the main challenge mode had shifted in focus, saying, "If the idea of trying, retrying, solving puzzles like that appeals over skating the outrageous narrow curves of the original, then this game will suit. Purists are likely to be disappointed." *NGC* scored it 85%, describing it as "big, varied, flawed in some places, outstanding in others". Reviewer Martin Kitts praised the variety of multiplayer minigames on offer, but criticised the sequel for being easier and reducing the skill factor involved in the stages. It's a good job it was good, as there wasn't much else out – save for the UK release of *Doshin The Giant* (7.4/10, *Cube*) and *Smuggler's Run: Warzones* (78% *NGC*, 7.1/10 *Cube*).

Despite the last film having been released in 1990, a licensed *Rocky* game arrived on Xbox and PS2 this month, and it turned out to be a heavyweight contender in the boxing game field. *Edge* scored the Xbox version 8/10 due to its challenging, strategic fights, praising it as "easily the best 3D interpretation of the sport to date" and "a splendid revival of a licence many thought was brain-dead". *XBM* was similarly impressed, scoring the game 8/10 and praising the graphical detail, noting that, "Body sections bruise and eventually cut as the skin begins to break. By the end of a battle the fighters can be quite repulsive!" *Play* scored the PS2 version 90%, praising the fact that it "uses the movie licence to full effect". Other Xbox games of note included *Quantum Redshift* (7/10 *Edge*, 6/10 *XBM*), *Transworld Snowboarding* (8/10 *XBM*), *Tetris Worlds* (4/10 *XBM*) and *Shadow Of Memories* (7/10 *XBM*).

[PS2] *Burnout 2* proved to be an incredibly exciting racer that anyone could have a *smashing* time with

[Dreamcast] Would *Ikaruga* be the last great game on Sega's final console?

However, the biggest surprise this month was that the Dreamcast didn't just play host to a new game, but a truly great one. The supposedly dead system reaped the benefits of its ties to the NAOMI arcade board, with a Japan-only conversion of Treasure's shoot-'em-up *Ikaruga*, in which players flipped their ship between black and white modes to negate enemy fire. *Edge* awarded the game 8/10, describing it as an "unforgiving, stunning, dramatic and overall monstrous" game that "can stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the best on the Xbox and PS2 and be proud" in graphical achievement.

Next month, seasonal madness hits and we finally get to consult a new magazine for opinions. ✱

CHARTS

NOVEMBER 2002

PLAYSTATION 2

1. Stuntman (Atari)
2. Turok: Evolution (Acclaim)
3. TOCA Race Driver (Codemasters)
4. Medal Of Honor: Frontline (EA)
5. Grand Theft Auto III (Rockstar)

XBOX

1. Buffy The Vampire Slayer (EA)
2. Conflict: Desert Storm (SCi)
3. Turok Evolution (Acclaim)
4. Halo: Combat Evolved (Microsoft)
5. Commandos 2: Men Of Courage (Eidos)

GAMECUBE

1. Super Mario Sunshine (Nintendo)
2. WWE Wrestlemania X8 (THQ)
3. Resident Evil (Capcom)
4. Turok: Evolution (Acclaim)
5. Super Smash Bros Melee (Nintendo)

MUSIC

1. Dirrty (Christina Aguilera)
2. Dilemma (Nelly ft. Kelly Rowland)
3. Heaven (DJ Sammy and Yanou ft Do)
4. Unbreakable (Westlife)
5. The Ketchup Song (Asereje) (Las Ketchup)

THIS MONTH IN...

NGC

"Can you possibly settle an argument? I believe that back in the early Eighties there was a *Zelda* TV cartoon. My daughter Casamya says that there was not, and that I am making it all up," writes Dad Talman. Well excuse *us*, princess, but there definitely was – as the *NGC* team correctly confirmed, calling it "priceless rubbish"

XBM

"Lastly I would like to ask if anyone has heard of my all time favourite online action game *Quake II* – it kicks ass," says reader Adam Tree, revealing the existence of a previously overlooked and unsung classic. "If you're on it look it out for me, adam and my m8 perk." We can only assume the plenty of Xbox *Quake II* players did just that.

Edge

What on Earth was going on at the *Edge* forum this month? User Penguin_Lad has been playing *Animal Crossing*, and asks "Am I the only one to write a love letter to one of the other characters?" The lad certainly has, confessing, "I chose the sexy feline Tangy, obviously the most nubile piece of ass in the local town of Salford." Okay ..

Radar Rat Race

IT'S A RAT TRAP

RETROREVIVAL

» VIC-20 » 1981 » COMMODORE

They say size doesn't matter, but at age 12 I knew I wasn't well endowed. My first computer was a VIC-20 and even at the start of the Eighties, it was obvious its 5K of RAM was not much to play with. Thankfully, and rather surprisingly for a home micro, over 180 games were released for the VIC in cartridge format, allowing extra memory to be included and resulting in some impressive releases for the time. I was blessed with the excellent Audiogenic pairing of *Cloudburst* and *Spiders Of Mars*, the seminal Scott Adams text adventures and Commodore itself produced many fine arcade clones, including *Jelly Monsters*, which was close enough to the original *Pac-Man* to irk the copyright holders into legal action.

Radar Rat Race was another rip-off, this time of Namco's *Rally-X* released into arcades the previous year, but author Bill Hindorff (one of the 'VIC Commandos', the codename given to the small team which developed the computer, trivia fans) cleverly gave the visuals a rodent makeover. The cars became rats, the flags turned into tasty slices of cheese and the rocks morphed into stationary cats, ready to gobble you up if you scurried their way. As for the smokescreen you could use in *Rally-X* to hold up your pursuers, you could now deposit what can only be described as sparkly rat droppings to choke any enemies on your tail.

Wiggling your way through the gigantic scrolling maze, evading the pack of evil red rats and constantly glancing over to the radar to check the location of your next piece of cheese, and plan your route accordingly, was a real challenge – as was staying sane while listening to the same seven seconds of *Three Blind Mice* on an endless loop.

Seeing the whole map, expertly pieced together by our own Martyn Carroll, takes me back to those innocent days at the dawn of home gaming – and is a pleasant reminder that it's not how big your hardware is, but how you use it that counts. ★

EEEK

EEEK

DISSECTING DOOM

WHEN ID SOFTWARE RELEASED ITS SHAREWARE GAME DOOM IN 1993 NO ONE KNEW JUST HOW INFLUENTIAL IT WOULD BECOME. JOIN US AS WE CELEBRATE ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT FIRST-PERSON SHOOTERS OF ALL TIME WITH CO-CREATOR JOHN ROMERO, DIRECTOR, TOM HALL AND THOSE THAT HAVE BEEN INFLUENCED BY IT

WORDS BY ADAM BARNES, DARRAN JONES AND NICK THORPE

JOHN ROMERO

SCOTT MILLER

TOM HALL

ALEX MAYBERRY

AUBREY HODGES

Today's gaming landscape would be very different without the influence of id Software's *Doom*. While it certainly wasn't the first game to adopt a first-person viewpoint, let you run rampant around mazelike arenas or go head-to-head against like-minded players with a thirst for destruction, it's arguably the game that laid the groundwork for everything that followed. There are numerous reasons why virtually every single shooting game that followed in its gory wake was referred to as a '*Doom* clone' and not a '*Wolfenstein 3D* clone'. id's hellish blaster did everything right, from its meticulously designed levels, to its satisfying weapons and imaginative enemies. *Doom* felt like a perfect storm, a culmination of all the techniques that John Carmack and the rest of id's talented development team had created whilst working on games like *Hovertank 3D* and *Wolfenstein 3D*. For many, *Doom* felt like the second coming and it proved that brutally fast-paced action wasn't just found in arcades, it could be enjoyed on the very systems typically used to create spreadsheets and other mundane tasks. *Doom* helped make PCs exciting, and even Bill Gates realised the game's appeal and starred in a video to help promote the release of *Doom95* on Windows 95 as Microsoft helped pushed Windows as a serious options for gamers.

Doom's gargantuan success, along with the continued interest in 3D gaming, saw plenty of other developers racing to market with their own takes on the popular game. Chief among them was id itself, which continued to push the first-person template with *Doom*'s very own sequel in 1994 and later with *Quake*, which ushered in proper 3D graphics, but there were plenty of other contenders to *Doom*'s throne, including *Heretic*, *Hexen*, *Star Wars: Dark Forces*, *Duke Nukem 3D* and countless others. Some games shamelessly copied *Doom*, while others went out of their way to improve on id Software's formula, whether it was by adding ever more over-the-top weaponry, or using a completely different setting, from dark fantasy/horror to familiar Earth-based adventures to separate their games from the Martian carnage of id's shooter. Some of these games were converted from *Doom*'s own engine, while others were built from the ground up in order to best fulfil the visions of the teams behind them.

Even today, the love and respect developers and gamers have for *Doom* within the industry runs deep, with even co-creator, John Romero recently returning to the game in order to create a brand-new set of levels for his expansion, *Sigil*. *Doom* was like a lit match to tinder and it ignited a passion in gamers that is only shared with the very greatest videogames today. We're delighted, then, to be able to look at id Software's game in a little more detail with both John Romero and Tom Hall and examine both its design and the aspects – from modding to the many bizarre systems that can run it – that have made *Doom* so memorable.

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Tom Hall on the origins of *Doom* and witnessing its impact on the industry.

22 OLD ROMERO DOOM
John Romero discusses *Doom*'s levels and talks us through that iconic first map.

24 DEMONS OF DOOM
[illegible] enemies and the [illegible]

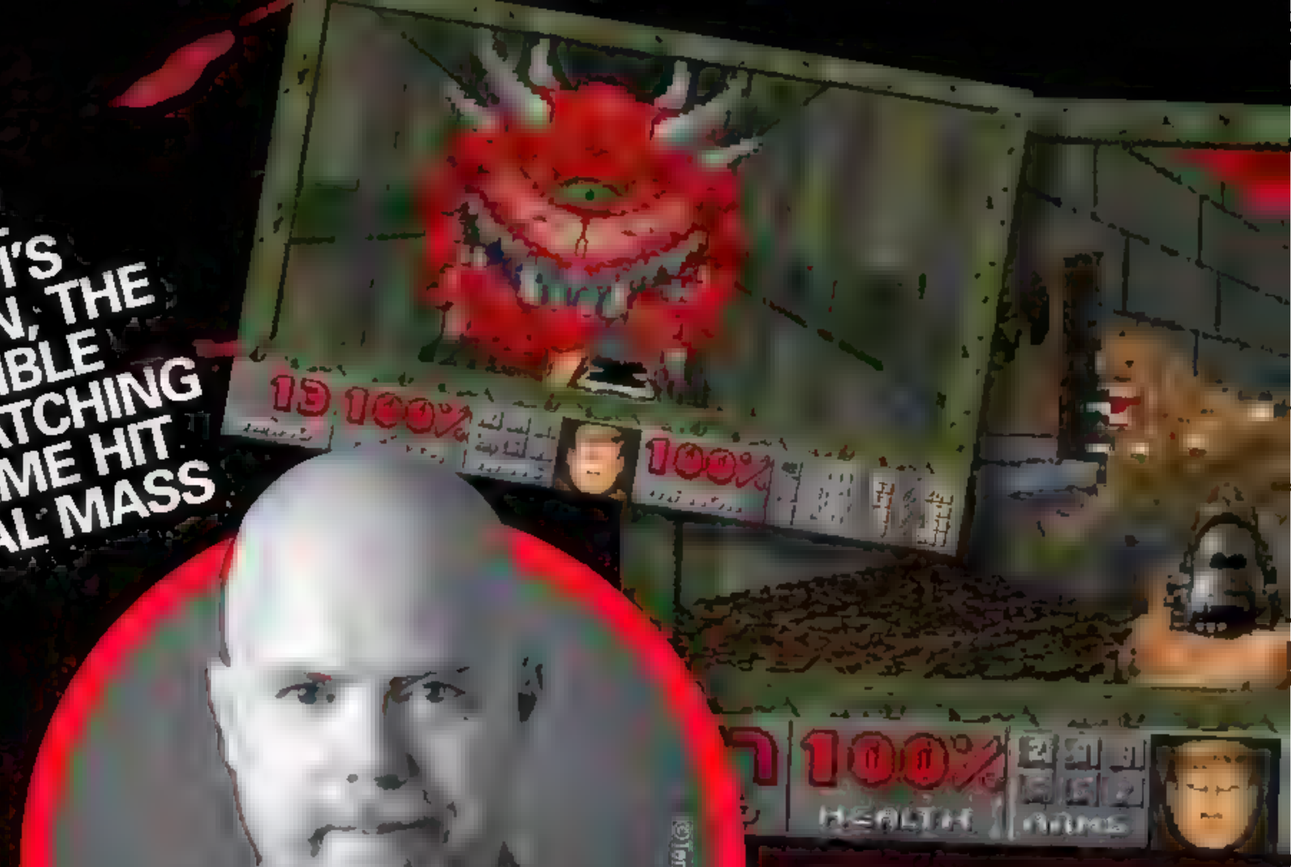
26 EVOLVING DOOM
[illegible] examine how shareware and modding sustained the shooter's success.

28 FLOOD DOOM
Scott Miller helps us chart the many similar games that followed in *Doom*'s wake.

30 DOES IT RUN DOOM?
Doom has popped up on all sorts of systems, and we show off some notable examples.

CREATING DOOM

TOM HALL ON DOOM'S CREATION, THE DOOM BIBLE AND WATCHING THE GAME HIT CRITICAL MASS



On its release, *Doom* felt like the culmination of a perfect storm. It featured cutting-edge technology, was freely available to play (thanks to a shareware distribution model) and it delivered an exciting arcade-like experience that few other games could match. Tom Hall, *Doom*'s director, explains how it all came together and when the development team realised just what it had created.

What did directing *Doom* involve?

Well, in early development and early id, [John] Carmack did mainly the engine; [John] Romero, the tools; me, design; and Adrian [Carmack] did art. [...] After doing many games together... we did *Commander Keen* one through three in two-and-a-half months. Romero also blasted out some levels near the end. Same for *Commander Keen* four through six, where he had more time and did great levels. Same for *Wolfenstein 3D*. Same for *Doom*. However, as documented in *Masters Of Doom*, that broke down with creative differences and such.

But generally, once the concept was agreed upon, [I was] creating a small story/theme, coming up with weapons (Carmack came up with the BFG, though, only he knew he could draw something that big!), world map, layout, coming up with monsters... I fought for non-bipedal monsters in *Doom*, so we got Cacodemons and Lost Souls – *something* needed to not come unsurprisingly walking at you on the ground. Then levels and ideas like 'nextcol scrolling' which allowed scrolling textures kind of for free.

Tell us about the *Doom Bible*...

I made it because I'd heard that TV shows have a 'show bible' that dictates what you can and can't do in the world, with characters and other details, so that seemed appropriate. Previous games we kind of just 'did'. I'd draw up a monster or idea for something, and Adrian would draw it brilliantly. For a game like *Rescue Rover*, with lots of puzzle elements, I did a design doc. But we were trying new stuff with making 3D models and getting them into the computer in rotations with a video camera. So there were more details and tech and tools for this game, so it seemed the time to make a more centralised repository of project info.

What elements never made it to the final cut?

Most obviously, the characters. We'd decided to have four-player multiplayer or co-op, so I imagined those four characters were sitting around a break room, playing cards, then a demon bursts in the room and it 'kills' whoever isn't playing. You are alone playing, it kills three. If it is four-player, no one dies.

Also I had a character that was just ahead of you called Buddy, telling you scraps of info, giving you direction, but most importantly, giving you dread for what you are about to head into, like in *Aliens*. James Cameron shows you all the colonists' transmitters are in the same place, so you have dread the whole way approaching it. It just gives a deeper experience to what you are going through. Also, like *Aliens*, you'd finally see Buddy, only to have him ripped in half by the Barons Of Hell, showing how dangerous they were, like ripping Bishop in half.

What improvements do you feel *DOOM* made over *Wolfenstein 3D*?

Of course, fully texturing the environment. Lighting, getting an even better set of progressive weapons and multiplayer. The best thing to me was going full dark. No game to my knowledge had, however briefly, just turned the lights off. That was terrifying. *Doom* was 'scarydarkfast' and that was really unique. *Doom* and *Doom II* had that. I didn't feel all three parts again until the most recent *Doom*.

You must have some interesting stories...

I remember almost making a game for Paramount for *Aliens* (Adrian was super-excited

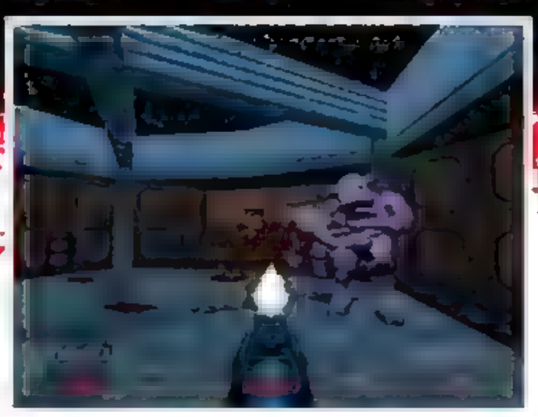
AFTER DOOM

SELECTED SEQUELS AND SPIN-OFFS THAT FOLLOWED IN DOOM'S WAKE

DOOM II: HELL ON EARTH

RELEASED: 1994

id Software's sequel not only featured a vastly improved multiplayer experience, but it also added more ambitious levels that were far larger in design and scope than *Doom*'s and greatly rewarded exploration. Other additions included new enemies (plus the return of many favourites) and the Super Shotgun (essentially a meaty double-barrelled shotgun).



DOOM 64

RELEASED: 1997

This N64 exclusive was developed by Midway Games and is set after *Final Doom*. It features a brand-new weapon, a laser called the Unmaker, along with 32 exclusive levels and two new monsters, the Nightmare Imp and Mother Demon. A remaster is currently in the works for Nintendo's Switch.

DOOM 3

RELEASED: 2004

There was a ten-year wait for id Software's third *Doom* game so John Carmack and his team could create a story-focused game with cutting-edge technology. It's essentially a reboot of the original game, with a strong focus on horror, something which divided critics at the time of release.

» [PC] Things really crank up on *Doom*'s second episode, with enemies often attacking in large groups.

» [PC] For all its weaponry, few things are as satisfying in *Doom* as punching a demon in its face.

» [PC] Thy Flesh Consumed was the fourth and final chapter of *The Ultimate Doom*, and it's bloody hard!

» [PC] It's easy to remember *Doom* as dark and gloomy, but it has plenty of sections where the action takes place outside.

about it, he loved HR Giger's work) instead of *Doom*... but in the end, we wanted to do our own thing. That decision turned out to be a big vector-change in id's future.

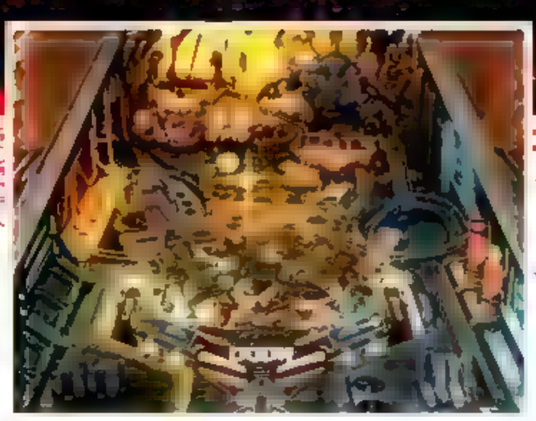
How important was shareware to *Doom*'s overall success?
At the time very important, as everyone could 'try before you buy'. And *Doom* was really something at the time, so they were hooked.

When did you first start becoming aware of *Doom*'s popularity?
Beyond sales, it was the way it crept into the public zeitgeist. Not just a *Wired* cover or awards, but we went to watch a demo scene showing, and one of the demos stopped for a second and printed, full-screen, 'WE LIKE *DOOM*'. Friends were always playing it, everyone played it after work. Later, people came up to me and said, 'I failed a semester because of *Doom*,' and, 'My parents got so mad at me for playing *Doom*.' It was an answer on *Jeopardy*. If someone [isn't] into videogames, to this day, they usually know *Doom*. It's part of our culture now.

How does it feel to be part of the team of developers that created one of most influential games of all time?
It was a profound privilege to work with such amazingly talented developers. First, we worked together at night, as [we] snuck into the Gamer's Edge department at Softdisk. Then we spent virtually every waking hour together for id's first three years. We were developers, we were friends. We did amazing games together and we pioneered a genre, the first-person shooter. What designer gets to do that? It was an honour to get to define the founding concepts, the simple but essential building blocks of a genre that are still used today. *Doom* was our fifth game in that genre, and was the culmination of all we'd learned. I remember asking [John] Carmack, as it was being released, how he thought the game turned out. He said, 'Better than we thought it could.' ▶

DOOM

RELEASED: 2016
First announced in 2008 as *Doom 4*, it went through an extensive development cycle, before being restarted in 2011. id Software's second reboot is a blast to play, thanks to its fast pace, large number of weapons and its brutal Glory Kills that allow you to effortlessly rip through your opponents.



DOOM PINBALL

RELEASED: 2016
This excellent pinball adaptation is part of Zen Studios' *Bethesda Bundle* and has a table that's themed around the 2016 reboot. The structure of the table is very good, with plenty of missions, great ball physics and lots of references to the original games. It also includes tables based on *Skyrim* and *Fallout*.

DOOM VFR

RELEASED: 2017
This companion piece to 2016's *Doom* features convincing, inventive use of virtual reality and lets you rip apart demons by teleporting into them. It's an incredibly fast-paced game, matching the ferocity and pace of the original *Doom*, but falls apart in the story department compared to the 2016 reboot.

DOOM ETERNAL

RELEASED: 2019
The latest *Doom* is due later this year and promises more Glory Kills, wall-climbing and dash moves, plenty of new enemies and new destructible demons. A new multiplayer mode, called Invasion, is also planned, where players can invade the games of others and fight them as Hellspawn.

DESIGNING DOOM

JOHN ROMERO EXPLAINS WHY DOOM'S EXCELLENT LEVEL DESIGN HELPED IT STAND APART FROM ITS PEERS ON RELEASE

There are numerous reasons why *Doom* holds up today, from its impressive use of lighting to create atmospheric locations, to its memorable enemies and satisfying selection of weapons. Perhaps one of the best reasons why id's shooter has stood the test of time so well is due to its exceptional level design, which becomes all the more impressive when you realise that there are absolutely no sections of the game where objects like bridges and arches cross over each other. "Well, it was much easier to not have full 3D at that time," explains John Romero, who created *Doom*'s levels. "If you look at a level from the top-down you'll see if there's a surface, there is nothing above or below it. It's very clean. We were concerned with delivering the best-looking world at a good framerate on 386 33mhz PCs in 1993."

Another aspect of *Doom*'s design that works so well is the flow it offers while playing. Some sections drop jump scares on you (something that would become far more prevalent in *Doom 3*) where others offer you vicious gauntlets of enemies that need to be dispensed with before you can progress. You never really know what to expect in *Doom*'s stages, with the flipside of that approach meaning there was a lot for John to think about. "There's a lot to consider," the developer muses when we asked about what needed to be taken into account while creating *Doom*'s varied levels. "You want to have a sense of what the overall design is, then support that with some landmark architecture and interesting views to other sections. Are you hiding enemies, then surprising the player? Are you allowing the player to explore for a while before they get into combat? Or do you want to constantly dribble out enemies? There's really an unlimited amount of design ideas you can pursue with *Doom*'s limitations."

Another aspect that many forget about *Doom* is the sheer amount of exploration that is offered during play. John's level design constantly encourages the player to not only explore their surroundings in order to find missing keys and seek out additional ammo and guns, but also to look for unusual designs in the map's layout in the hope of discovering one of *Doom*'s many hidden secrets that could reward you with useful caches to help with your fight against the horde. "I think secrets are an additional fun vector to include in any game," continues John. "Those secrets can really help you out, and if you're desperate you will absolutely press every single wall! I still put all kinds of secrets in every game I make. With my recently released *Sigil* (*Doom* levels), I made sure there were at least four secrets on every level."

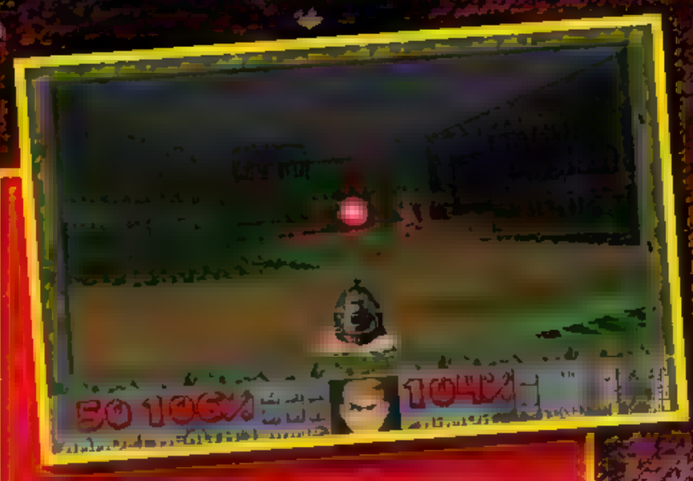
Perhaps the biggest testament to *Doom*'s design is just how well the first stage still plays. It introduces you to all the techniques you'll need to use as you make your way through the game, and highlights just how well-crafted id's classic is. "E1M1 was the last level I created so I could pour all the design language developed for the game so people would be most impacted there," says John. "It probably took a couple weeks to get streamlined." It remains one of our favourite stages from the game, and we were keen to know what other maps hold a special place in John's heart. "That's tough," he says. "E1M1 is nice and simple, and the level many people remember. E1M3 had the best secrets, and was the first backtrack design in *Doom*. E1M7 was big and had lots of backtracking. I loved E2M5 because it was huge, and a challenge to live through. E2M2 was the first crate maze in a 3D game. E2M8 was scary and [had] the introduction of the Cyberdemon. It's so hard to choose! Well, I'll just pick E1M7. It has a lot in it."

DESIGNER COMMENTARY

JOHN ROMERO LOOKS BACK AT HIS ICONIC FIRST STAGE

"The outdoor courtyard is an important part of the level because it shows players that they can, in fact, get outside somehow, if only they would search for it. The blue armour in the pond is very powerful, and in deathmatch it's the best way to get the higher frag count. You can also get a rocket launcher and scoop up a lot of rockets out there in deathmatch. This is one of the very few secret areas in *Doom* that is accessed by two secret doors."

"This room is your second run-in with enemies. There's plenty of space to move around, so don't worry too much. Two guys flanking the doorway as you come in could surprise you. Look around and you'll find some health."



"The zigzag walkway keeps most people from dashing to the door. This gives the imp some time to throw some fireballs. There's a big window looking back into the first room where you started, and you can see a pond of goo outside that has blue armour in it. There has to be a way out there."

"The blue carpet with the remains of a space marine is unexpected to anyone who thought *Doom* was brown and grey. To the right you can see the mountains of Phobos, and to the left you see a room you want to explore. This is the start of a great adventure."

"Finally, the exit. Don't be surprised if you find someone in this room on the harder difficulties! Flip the switch and move on."

"There's a shotgun and health are sitting here. It's mostly for players in deathmatch."

DEMONS OF DOOM

A QUICK GLANCE AT ANY OF DOOM'S BESTIARY OF BADDIES IS ALL IT TAKES TO IMMEDIATELY KNOW THAT YOU'RE LOOKING AT AN ENEMY FROM THE GAME, BUT WHAT MAKES THESE CREATURES SO ICONIC? AND DID THEIR DESIGN HELP TO MAKE DOOM STAND OUT ALL THE MORE?

Around the time of *Doom*'s release, there were – generally speaking – only two categories that games fell into: the swords and spells of Tolkienesque fantasy, or the laser rifles and interstellar spaceships of sci-fi. *Doom* stood apart from that, delving instead into the catacombs of Hell for a repository of otherworldly and demonic beasts to battle and it was all the better for it. "The demonic theme comes from our *Dungeons & Dragons* campaign Carmack ran up to 1991," reveals John Romero, who goes on to explain that within this campaign, "the world was destroyed by an infinite amount of invading demons from hell. That seemed like a cool idea for a game."

It was a cool idea for a game and it also became the pervasive concept surrounding *Doom*, and from there the idea was further explored. "Definitely *Aliens* was an inspiration for the feeling the player should have when surrounded by demons," says John, who adds that "*Evil Dead 2* was the inspiration for the shotgun, chainsaw and dark humour." But *Doom* was careful with its enemy progression, starting first with basic human-like enemies – that were in fact zombies – before introducing a greater sense of the underworld the deeper into the bowels of Hell the player went. The Imp, the Baron Of Hell, the Cacodemon... each new beast was revealed gradually and purposefully, introducing the player to new, increasingly horrific designs as well as the varied ways not only in which they fight but also how they must be fought. Interestingly, before they made it into the final game, *Doom*'s iconic enemies were first created using clay models. "It allowed us to scan a 3D model quickly," continues John, "but the huge drawback was when we changed the position of the arms and legs for animation. The clay tore and had to be remodelled. That was the end of clay modelling." Despite the issues those clay designs created, it allowed the team at id to demonstrate tremendous creativity. This originality and uniqueness meant that every one of *Doom*'s Hellspawn etched itself on the player's mind: they were completely new, and when pit against the player in planned, scary reveals became all the more haunting and unforgettable as a result. "The Baron is memorable because he's a tank and looks more like a classic demon than anything else in the game," suggests John. "The Cacodemon is memorable because he looks great and was a brand-new thing that no one had seen in games at the time."

FANTASTIC BEASTS...

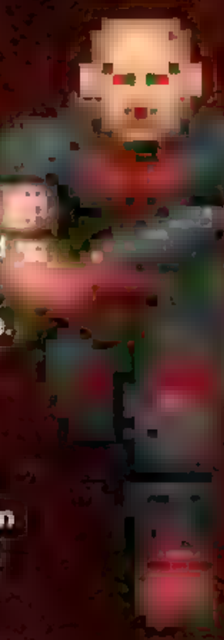
THE FOOTSOLDIERS OF HELL

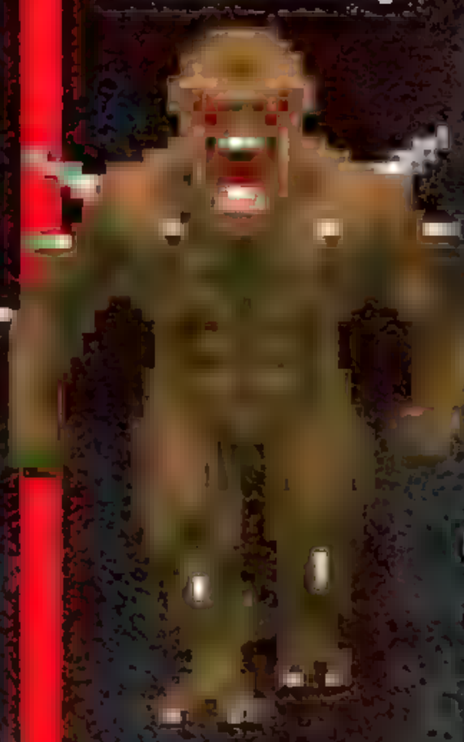
FORMER HUMAN

Termed the 'Trooper' or 'Zombieman' by the *Doom* community, these undead soldiers are the initial enemy you'll encounter in *Doom* and by far the least threatening. They quickly become the fodder of the game, thanks in large part to their terrible aim and low damage.

FORMER SERGEANT

While an upgrade on the basic Trooper enemy, the Sergeant carries a shotgun and is therefore a greater threat at closer range. Many of the levels use this as a tactic, having the zombie appear from behind secret walls that open in close proximity to the player.





IMP

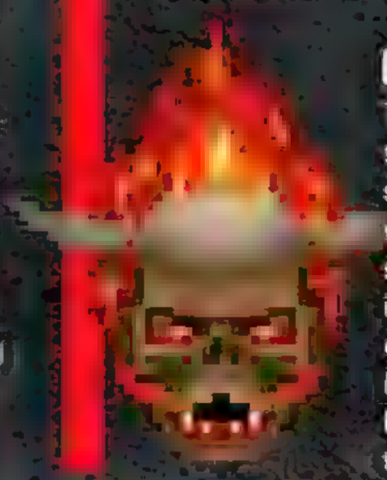
The first of the 'true' demons to appear in the game, the Imp is the perfect opportunity to practice the run-and-gun combat style that is so crucial to surviving in the game. Their slow projectiles might be a bother at first, but by the end they're barely a concern.

SPECTRE

The Spectre is almost identical in function to the Demon, except that it appears as nearly invisible. Since the PlayStation and N64 couldn't handle the invisible effect of the DOS version, these had to be handled differently. We've included the *Doom 64* sprite, simply so you can see it.

DEMON

Since this familiar piggy is only capable of a close bite, the beast's strategy is to use its speed to quickly close the distance with the player. Despite its ape-like look, the Demon's legs were actually modelled on a *Jurassic Park* Dilophosaurus (the spitting one) toy.



LOST SOUL

They might not be grand in stature, but Lost Souls are still a pain to have to deal with. They don't have a sound effect when the player is detected, for example, the only signal being their iconic hiss that they make as they begin the fast-paced charge towards the player.

...AND HOW TO FRAG THEM

THE DEMON-SLAYING TOOLS OF THE TRADE

CACODEMON

Having since become the poster boy of the series, the Cacodemon certainly looks like a visual concept original to *Doom*. It was, however, partly inspired by the Astral Dreadnought on the front cover of *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons' Manual Of The Planes* released in 1987.

CYBERDEMON

First introduced as a boss, the Cyberdemon is by far and away one of the biggest threats you'll face in *Doom*. It has the biggest pool of health of any enemy in the game, fires three rockets at a time and is immune to splash damage: in other words, it's the ultimate beast to down.

BARON OF HELL

These Minotaur-like beasts are when things really start to heat up in the game, since these brawlers can not only take a lot of abuse but their ranged fireball is much quicker than the Imp's and far more damaging.

SPIDERDEMON

Later referred to as The Spider Mastermind to give it the significance it deserves, the Spiderdemon is the final boss of the game and the instigator of the Hellspawn invasion of the moons of Mars. While it is an abomination of demon flesh and technology, the Spiderdemon was actually going to have a secondary magical attack that was cut from the game.

KNUCKLEDUSTER

As the melee attack, this is the only weapon in the game that you'll always have by your side. It can be effective in certain situations, though, and when combined with the Berserk power-up it can pummel through many of the game's enemies.

CHAINSAW

It's hard not to feel like a badass when wielding one of these, but while it might feel cool it does mean getting up close and personal with some of Hell's toughest creatures. Certain enemies, however, such as the Cacodemon, are vulnerable to the constant pain it deals.

PISTOL

The basic weapon of any space marine is pretty much the only tool at your disposal when taking on the likes of the recently rerisen zombie fodder you'll face at the start of *Doom*, but very quickly you'll outgrow its limited damage and slow rate of fire.

SHOTGUN

The shotty adds a bit of range and a bit better damage to your arsenal, but it is naturally well suited to closer range combat due to the multiple shells it fires. As a result, it's pretty much your go-to weapon when demons come a-running.

CHAINGUN

This is the weapon that essentially replaces the pistol since it feeds from the same ammo supply. However, because of the high rate of fire, it's very useful when facing enemies, with higher chances of pain since it'll stun them completely.

ROCKET LAUNCHER

Long-ranged and explosive, the rocket launcher is the essential tool for wiping out large groups of weaker enemies or getting a strong pre-emptive strike on tougher opponents. Since it fires a slowish-moving projectile, you'll need to predict enemy movement.

PLASMA GUN

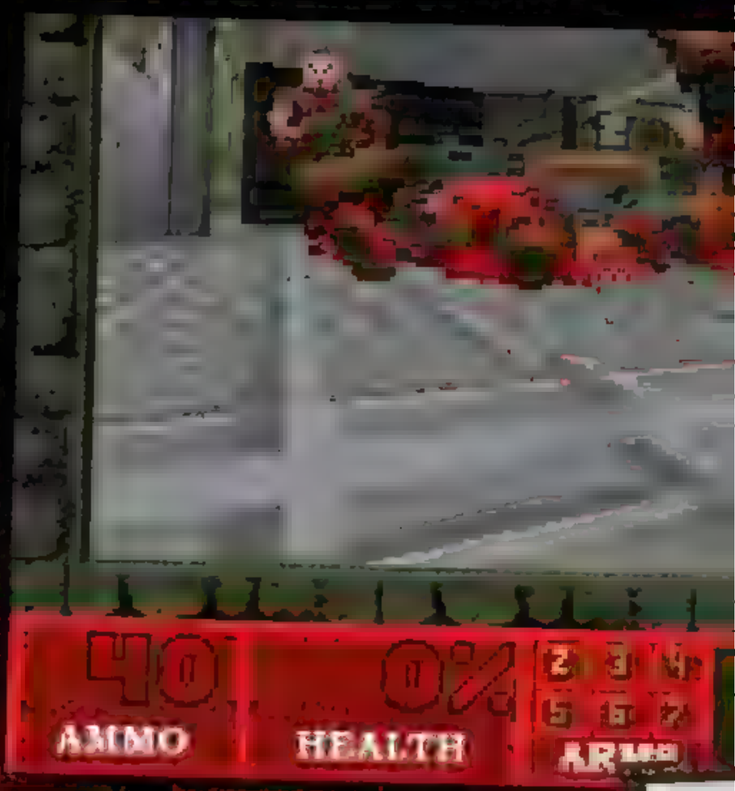
The high damage of the Plasma Gun is counteracted by its erratic accuracy at longer range, but in the right hands it can be quite the devastating tool. Interestingly, when running out of ammo with another weapon, the game's code prioritises this weapon above all else.

BFG9000

Notoriously standing for 'Big Fucking Gun', the BFG is the ultimate weapon in *Doom* thanks to the high-damage capabilities that a blast of its plasma ball can do. Naturally its ammo is extremely scarce, so you'll want to make sure you only make use of its in dire situations.

EVOLVING DOOM

DOOM HAD EVERYTHING IT NEEDED TO SHAKE UP THE INDUSTRY, INCLUDING TWO CRUCIAL DECISIONS SURROUNDING HOW THE GAME WAS SHARED



[PC] Some DoomWADs, such as *Hell Revealed*, were notorious for their difficulty, which often thrust players in the deep end.

Even now, all these years later, you can still find *Doom* available for download in its shareware form on countless corners of the internet. It's perhaps not surprising considering this free version of the game was so widespread, since it allowed players to experience just a little bit of what the game had to offer. *Doom* was the hot topic in gaming at the time of its release, everyone knew about it, and id Software's decision to make a whole chapter's worth of action available to play for free at a time before demos were such a de facto part of gaming, well, that helped get the conversation going.

"When *Doom* first came out, I initially mistook it for another version of *Wolfenstein*, which I never cared for much," says Alex Mayberry, who has worked as a designer and producer on games like *Diablo III*, *Quake II* and *Kingpin: Life Of Crime*. "Eventually, though, I downloaded the shareware version and gave it a try. I remember when the game loaded how taken I was by it. There was a *moment* for me; it was the first time a game had put me into a virtual world where I achieved immersion in it." And so, rather than just rumours of a groundbreaking first-person shooter coming from word of mouth or the screenshots printed in the latest magazine, gamers could actually get hold of the game and experience it for themselves.

There's a smartness about the shareware version, too, essentially unlocking everything except for two of three chapters. All the weapons, all the monsters, all the secrets that are available as part of the paid-for game are available in the shareware version, meaning that players had plenty to see – the only limitation coming at the end of the first chapter. It was tantalising, too, the slow build up of weaponry and the Hellspawn to use them against them was subtle, yet noticeable. At the end of the locked version, the player faces off against a pair of Barons Of Hell, a fearsome reveal and a tough fight to boot. The reward? A portal that should – in theory – take the player to the Shores Of Hell and episode two, but instead they're met with a darkened room and an anticlimactic death. Always leave them wanting more, they say, and *Doom*'s shareware version did just that.

But while the shareware version of *Doom* meant the game was widespread, this perhaps wasn't the reason it has maintained such a fanbase over the years. id Software had seen what modders had achieved with the closed engine of *Wolfenstein* and were inspired, ultimately leading to a decision at the start of *Doom*'s development to make the game – and the engine powering it – as open to modders as possible. The result was DoomWADs, which leveraged the .WAD file structure of the engine to allow players to make their own changes to the game, even complete overhauls.

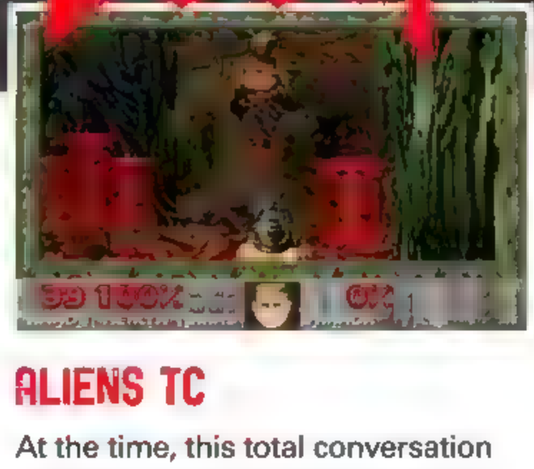
"My first attempt at WAD editing was to simply change something in the game," recalls Alex, whose career as a game developer began with modding *Doom*. He talks of how his first simple change – to swap the first shotgun

THE BEST DOOM WADS

HUNGRY FOR MORE DOOM? DOWNLOAD THESE

DOOM THE WAY ID DID

A noble idea, this one, what with its creators wanting to release a trio of episodes that are akin to the original *Doom* experience with the same style and gameplay design. What is interesting is how relatively new this WAD is, since it came out in 2012; to put that into perspective, *Duke Nukem Forever* released in 2011.

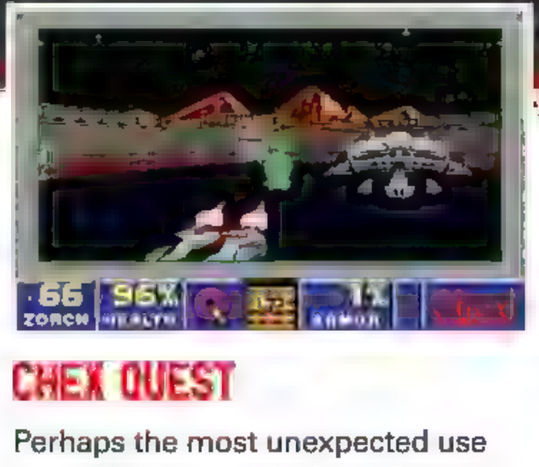


ALIENS TC

At the time, this total conversation of *Doom* set in the *Aliens* universe was getting about as much hype as id's own sequel, and rightly so. The attention to detail is incredible, while the tangible sense of fear and horror that is so essential to the *Alien* franchise even surpasses *Doom*'s own shock horrors.

ICARUS: ALIEN VANGUARD

The first WAD release of TeamTNT, *Icarus: Alien Vanguard* can perhaps be seen as the beginning of something great. This historic modding team was well known among the DoomWAD community, and its 1996 release was a sign of the dedication it would later go on to bring to the *Doom* modding scene.



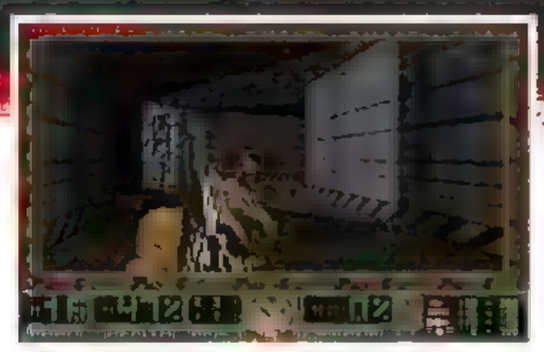
CHEX QUEST

Perhaps the most unexpected use of the WAD scene is *Chex Quest*, which totally converted the gore and the guts of *Doom* into something that's a lot more wholesome and friendly. Of course, this was all in aid of an American cereal brand, but there's no overlooking how smart this WAD was.

(PC) The opening level of *Eternal Doom* – created by Alex Mayberry – starts with the player bursting into danger from a cryo chamber.

in the game to a plasma rifle – was revelatory. "From that point I was instantly hooked on building levels," he adds. Alex became embedded within the WAD community long before it was even a community, and from there his involvement in the modding scene grew. "I joined together with a group of other WAD-makers and we formed Team Eternal. We met frequently in chat rooms on CompuServe, and together we created the first 'TC' – Total Conversion – of *Doom II*, called *Eternal Doom*."

To fans of DoomWADs, *Eternal Doom* is well known. It was one of the biggest WADs available for the game both in terms of size and popularity, alongside the likes of *Aliens TC*, *Hell Revealed* or *Memento Mori*. And while passionate fans took to *Doom* editors to build their own versions in the shape of *Doom* and create experiences that complement the base game for like-minded fans to enjoy, that wasn't the end of the story. As with any game sustained by modding, there's a vibrant community still playing DoomWADs to this day. "The game has definitely aged," says Paul DeBruyne, "but it hasn't gotten old because there's always something new to experience." Paul's earliest DoomWAD credit was in 1998 but his most recent is 2018, proving there's been a sustainable life to the game entirely because of modding. "id was smart to embrace the modding community in the early days, rather than trying to shut it down. The community grew to a critical mass and it's never really slowed down. When id released *Doom*'s source code – which was basically unheard of – it more or less ensured that *Doom* would continue to get new features and be ported to contemporary operating systems, which makes the community around the game really resilient and self-sufficient even after 25 years. I'm not sure we'll ever see this degree of trust or ownership placed on a game's community again." ▶



ETERNAL DOOM

Perhaps one of the most famous 'megawads', *Eternal Doom* was expansive in its extension of the base *Doom II* game with 32 levels and a completely new soundtrack to go with it. Many of the creators of this megawad went on to work professionally within the games industry as designers.

SIGIL

As an unexpected surprise to celebrate *Doom*'s 25th anniversary, John Romero himself returned to *Doom* development to create *Sigil*. With its nine levels that focus on the occult, it is considered the spiritual successor of the third episode of *Doom* and begins right where the original ended.

MAESTRO OF MAYHEM

AUDREY HODGES ON CREATING DOOM'S SOUNDTRACK FOR CONSOLES

Let's start at the beginning. How did you come to work on the *Doom* soundtrack?

id and Midway had decided to team up to bring *Doom* to console and a team from id visited Midway San Diego and toured the facility. They asked to hear some of my latest work and in the middle of listening to one of my tracks they told me to pause. At that point they told me that they needed me to create the music and sound design for *Doom* on the PlayStation. I was both humbled and a little nervous, but I was determined to justify their faith in me. I started on the project later that same day.

You can buy Audrey's *Doom* soundtrack by visiting audreyhodges.bandcamp.com

Where you familiar with the original PC soundtrack?

Oh yeah, everyone played *Doom* back then! I loved what Bobby Prince had created and the fun energy the tracks brought to the game.

How long did the soundtrack take to create and what difficulties did you face?

I completed all the music and sounds in roughly four months. I had to overcome some serious limitations but, ironically, those very issues became a part of what makes the score so memorable and unique. The CD audio was not going to be able to be used during the game because the levels were streaming from CD. This meant I was only able to use the onboard MIDI sampler for music. Additionally, I only had 500K of memory for all music and sound effects. 300K was allocated to sound effects and 200k for music. (20K for the MIDI data and 180K for the sample data). In today's terms, this is miniscule. In addition, the development software for the PlayStation that was delivered to me from Sony was only in Japanese, which I do not understand. So I had to experiment with what all the button symbols meant and keep notes.

Did you intend to make your soundtrack more brooding and foreboding compared to the PC original?

In the beginning, not so much. I originally went in a similar stylistic direction to the original. However, the memory restrictions for sample storage and other issues forced me to think 'outside the box' and experiment. The more I developed my techniques and tested them with gameplay, I became convinced that the same heightened level of stress and tension could be achieved with this style of 'music' rather than the high energy rock/metal. Granted, it does not provide the sense of 'fun' and energy that the original approach provided. Instead, the dark ambient approach makes up for that by adding to the unworldliness and alien aspect of the locations themselves. I thought it was a decent trade-off given the more dark and sinister version of the game we were crafting.

How did you mix things up for the 20th anniversary version?

This version features extended ultra long arrangements of all the level tracks, new versions of the *Main Theme* and *Finale* tracks and eight all new bonus tracks created using the same techniques used 20 years ago. This album is over five-and-a-half hours of music!

CLONING DOOM

BEFORE A GENRE WAS CREATED, FIRST-PERSON SHOOTERS WERE KNOWN BY THEIR MEDIA-GIVEN NAME OF 'DOOM CLONE'

[PC] Pixel Titan's *Strafe* was released in 2017 and wears its *Doom* influences on its bloody sleeves.

[PC] *Duke Nukem 3D* is one of the better shooters that followed in *Doom*'s wake and pushed the genre in its own distinctive way.

[PC] Raven Software's *Heretic* uses a modified version of the *Doom* engine.

You know when a game has truly made an impact when all those that follow in its footsteps are, whether fairly or not, compared to the predecessor.

Even to this day any action RPG with a top-down viewpoint is called a '*Diablo* clone' for example. While *Doom* perhaps didn't start the first-person shooter – those laurels go to its big brother, *Wolfenstein 3D* – it was special enough to kickstart a genre thanks to its approach to technology, game design and visual flair. "Let's be clear, I think *Doom* is the greatest achievement in the game industry," highlights Scott Miller, whose own games would go on to be bundled in among the other so-called '*Doom* clones' of the time. "It was innovative on so many fronts, its BSP-based 3D engine, streamlined high-speed gameplay, built-in support for the mod community, LAN multiplayer for both deathmatch and co-op. It was the ultimate marriage of tech advancements and killer gameplay."

But Scott was actually aware of the splash that *Doom* was about to make in the industry, even ahead of the game's release. His company, Apogee Software, had published and produced *Wolfenstein 3D*, and so Scott had a close relationship with the team at id Software. "I was able to visit id's offices several times during *Doom*'s development and got to see the game at various stages," he adds. "I knew they were onto something massive." This gave Scott and Apogee an advantage that many didn't have, as well as the understanding that Apogee needed to 'bust ass' if it was going to keep up with *Doom*.

It was a sensation that many developers will have felt at the time. *Doom* was so compelling, so game-changing that to ignore what id was making possible would have been foolish. *Doom* released in December of 1993, and yet already in 1994 there were a slew of games emulating its approach, likely thanks to the early heads-up that *Wolfenstein 3D* had given developers. Some wanted to do their own thing in the same space, while others wanted to improve on what id Software had produced. "That's why we decided to focus on games with interesting characters, like Duke and Lo Wang," says Scott. "We also added many other elements to our games to stand out, like interactivity, slopes, humour, really wacky weapons and exploding walls. We knew we couldn't keep up with id when it came to technology, so we had to beat them in other areas."

NOTABLE *DOOM* CLONES

GREAT ALTERNATIVES YOU NEED TO EXPERIENCE

DUKE NUKEM 3D

Arguably the most notorious of *Doom* clones, 3D Realms brought a bigger personality to the *Doom* experience. This meant a recognisable and humorous character, over-the-top weaponry and a few moments very deserving of its 18 rating. Famously, the series didn't end up at the heights that started with this FPS, but back when it was released it was one of the better 'clones'.

STAR WARS: DARK FORCES

It's true that no one could overlook the inspiration that *Dark Forces* came from, but there were numerous additions that really pushed the FPS forward for the time. Greater emphasis on environmental puzzles, the ability to jump and swim, and even graphical enhancements all helped LucasArts' shooter stand on its own – though it was still tarred with the '*Doom* clone' brush.

MARATHON

Often overlooked in lieu of *Halo*, Bungie's first FPS actually goes a long way of demonstrating some of the style and capabilities of the team that went on to redefine combat. It was much more cinematic than *Doom* was and actually allowed for y-axis aiming – a genuine innovation at the time. But since it was exclusive to Mac computers, it didn't garner the audience that it definitely deserved.

THE TERMINOLOGY OF DOOM

Many significant games come with their own unique terminologies that become widespread, but few have had the same impact as *Doom* did in how it got people talking. '*Doom* clone' is the obvious example, which was used to easily and effectively explain how a similar game played by using *Doom* as a reference point.

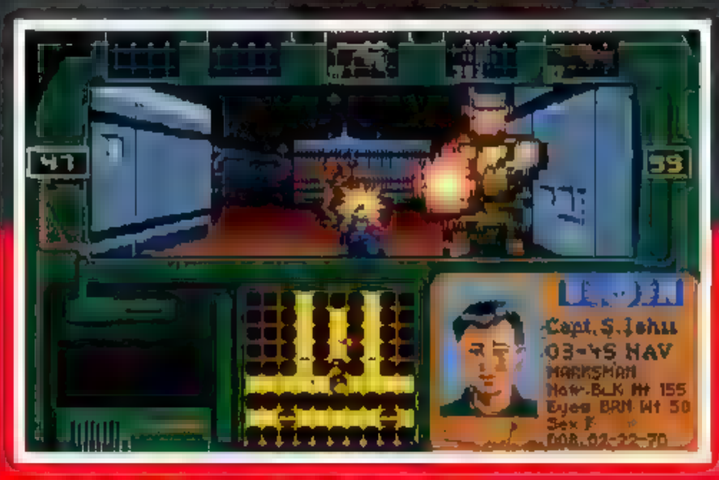
But then there's terms like 'WAD', an acronym of 'Where's All The Data?', which was the default format for package files used in *Doom* and became shorthand for 'mod'. 'Deathmatch' was also born from *Doom*'s pioneering multiplayer mode, as is 'frag' – meaning a point scored for killing another player – both of which are synonymous with multiplayer gaming to this day. Even the concept of 'speedrunning' started with *Doom*, the fast-paced, skill-orientated gameplay well suited to competitively beating a game as fast as possible, and it built up a strong community of speedrunning gamers around that.

It didn't matter what the subject matter or the gameplay style was, if you produced a first-person game in the years that followed *Doom*, it was branded a clone. "I thought '*Doom* clone' was idiotic and ignorant of this new FPS category," says Scott. "So I never used that term and corrected all the press who used it. Every 3D game that came out after *Doom* was called a '*Doom* clone'. The press wasn't smart enough back then to recognise that a new genre was emerging, the FPS genre."

The impact it had was phenomenal, Apogee even rebranded the company to pair up its own FPS games with a new name that demonstrated the significance of the technology: 3D Realms was the name, producing *Blood*, *Shadow Warrior* and *Duke Nukem 3D* quickly to ride the wave that *Doom* was forming. "I wanted to be coming out with the best ones as soon as possible," says Scott. "The bigger risk was not taking *Doom* on!"

Comparisons to *Doom* were inevitable: there was nothing else like it at that point, and with no language to help express how a similar game might play, the press, Usenet users and early internet pages had to draw references to the only thing they knew. *Duke Nukem* had managed to carve its own niche out of the new genre, but still it was compared to *Doom* as a clone. The shift in terminology didn't really start until 1996 and the release of *Quake*, at which point 'first-person shooter' started to enter into the industry's dictionary. By 1998 after other developers had released their own impressive FPS games, the two terms had switched in their usage and by the early Noughties the phrase '*Doom* clone' was all but forgotten.

Until now. There's no destroying the heritage of a game like *Doom*, and now that indie development has given rise to the popularity of neo-retro gaming, the term '*Doom* clone' has once again returned. Games like *Dusk*, *Strafe* or 3D Realms' own *Ion Fury* all wear the *Doom* inspiration with pride. Heck, there's even a '*Doom* clone' tag on Steam these days.

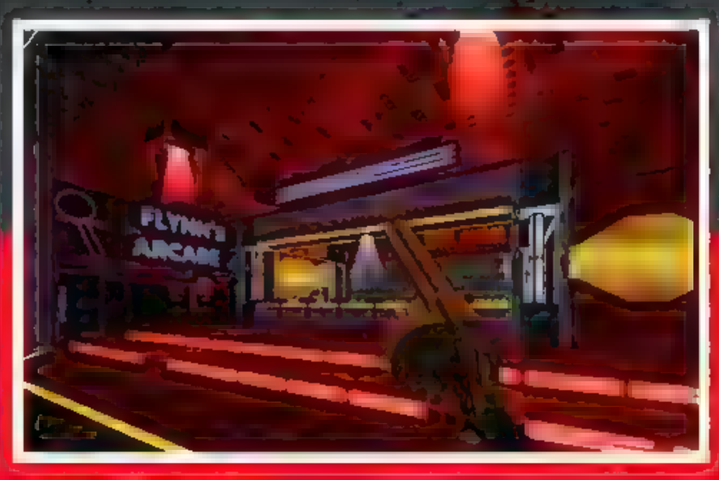


ZERO TOLERANCE

There's no doubting the technical achievement behind *Doom*, but there's certainly cause to claim *Zero Tolerance* an even more impressive feat. Replicating the first-person combat on the Mega Drive is certainly worthy of praise, and while it didn't quite match the speed or quality of id's breakthrough shooter, it did at least provide *Doom*-like gameplay to an audience that perhaps wouldn't have had access to it.

HERETIC

It's perhaps hard to claim *Heretic* (and its follow-up, *Hexen*) as *Doom* clones, since the game has such close ties to id Software and John Romero, and actually runs on the same engine. Many of the weapons in the game are actually reworkings of *Doom*'s own arsenal of firepower in fact. Even so, the occult-fuelled gameplay and novel additions to the engine still make *Heretic* a *Doom* clone worth playing.



ION FURY

In more recent times, the revival of *Doom* clones has been brought on by a growing distaste for modern FPS games and a renewed love of the classics we used to love. One recent example of this is *Ion Fury*, 3D Realms' tribute to its own Build engine games. It is reminiscent of the fast-paced, *Duke*-style gameplay, and even uses 2D sprites for enemies. It's a modern *Doom* clone, though Scott wouldn't want us to say that.

DOES IT RUN DOOM?

ID'S ICONIC GAME HAS APPEARED ON COUNTLESS SYSTEMS, AND VIRTUALLY ANYTHING WITH A CPU

[Jaguar] The Atari Jaguar conversion provided the basis for many of the mid-Nineties console versions of *Doom*.

[PlayStation] On Sony's platform, *Doom* received some enhancements like coloured lighting effects.

***Doom* will always be most heavily associated with the DOS PC gaming scene of the early Nineties, and that's justified – but really, it was a phenomenon that spread far beyond that platform.** That was by design, as the game was developed on high-end NeXT workstations before being ported over to DOS. The game spread across the computer world through 1994, gaining official ports to Mac OS, Linux, OS/2 and other operating systems.

Doom was a bit of a beast to run in its day – although a 386 CPU was required, a 486 was recommended. Players saddled with an older processor would often have to use the screen-reducing border option to add some speed to their experience. As a result, for a brief time in the Nineties before the advent of *Quake*, *Doom* was the game that PC enthusiasts could point to as justification for any claims of format supremacy. All of the next-generation consoles of the era received conversions, but many of them struggled to live up to the splendour of the original. Most of the console versions were missing at least some of the levels, and pretty much every version missed some enemies. Some of the versions lacked music, while others had it downgraded. Even the excellent PlayStation version had to make compromises, though it made up for them by including many of *Doom II*'s levels and an all-new soundtrack.

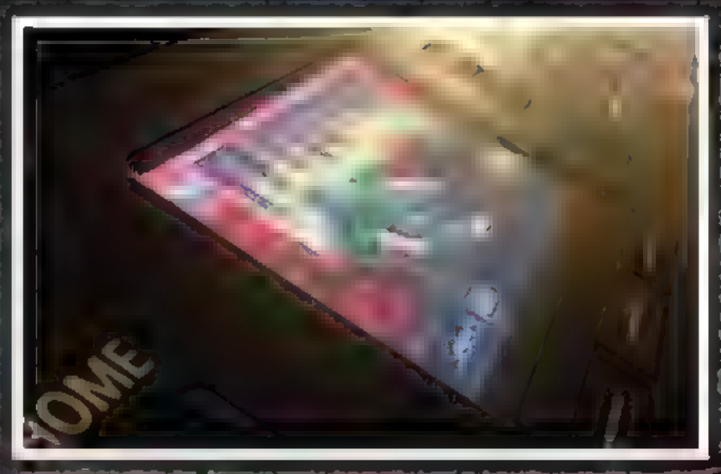
As time went on and official conversions of *Doom* dwindled, id Software released the source code for the game in 1997. Fans took on the challenge of adapting the game to other formats, which led to some truly bizarre ports. Fans were much more ambitious with the hardware they targeted, often shooting for either woefully underpowered gaming hardware or sufficiently powerful non-gaming hardware. Where developers had once struggled to replicate *Doom* on state-of-the-art dedicated gaming devices, it has become a game that you can happily run on calculators and printers. That the game has achieved such a level of ubiquity is a testament to the fame that *Doom* has achieved.

WAIT... *THAT* RUNS DOOM?

SOME OF THE MOST BIZARRE AND IMPRESSIVE CONVERSIONS OF ID'S CLASSIC SHOOTER

SNES

This was the original 'impossible port' of *Doom*. The game required the SuperFX 2 chip and still required several cutbacks, but it was a miracle that it worked at all. It's a pretty respectable version, with levels based off the original DOS versions and enemies that don't appear in other console versions.



PRINTER

Security researcher Michael Jordon got this particular hack working in 2014, as a means of showing off a serious security flaw in Canon's Pixma printers. While this particular demonstration saw the device running *Doom*, it could also have been used to spy on documents being printed or create a network backdoor.

Q&A THE KINSIE

THE OWNER OF IT RUNS DOOM (ITRUNSDOOM.TUMBLR.COM) TAKES US INTO THE WORLD OF DOOM PORTS

Did you first encounter *Doom* via the PC version, or one of the ports? What did you make of it?

I first discovered *Doom* when the shareware release came out on PC and my dad bought it home from work. I was very much a console-head at the time (to be fair, the SNES was *really* good!), so I largely put it aside for a couple of years until *Doom II* arrived and all the high-quality mods and elaborate total conversions really started hitting, at which point I was hooked.

Why did you decide to catalogue *Doom* ports?

There used to be a website that did pretty much the same thing (*It Plays Doom*, I think it was called) which ultimately dropped off the internet completely. I thought it was a bit of a missed opportunity for there to be no such thing, so I decided to more or less revive it myself using the Tumblr service instead of taking the time to hack together my own website. It seems to have worked out decently enough!

Why do people decide to run *Doom* on such odd devices as printers and ATMs?

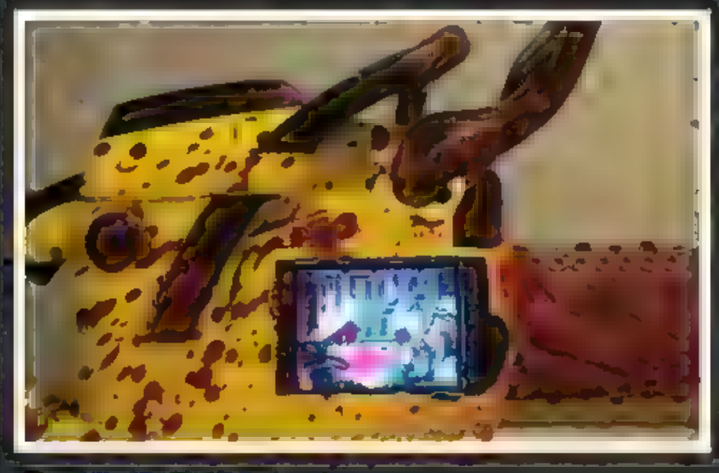
Even relatively simple and low-power modern devices are typically much more computationally powerful than the average PC was in 1993, which makes it a lot easier. In addition, if you're, say, a security researcher messing around with a device that isn't supposed to run user-supplied software (like a printer or ATM), then putting a famous 3D action game on there is a hell of a lot more attention-grabbing than making it print 'Hello World' to the screen. So there's admittedly a big novelty factor to a lot of these ports. Combine that with homebrew coders with a desire to play the game (and its legion of mods) on the latest and greatest game systems like the Switch, and you get a whole lot of ports with a wide variety of reasons to exist.

Why do you think *Doom* specifically gets ported so often, compared to other classic games?

Wolfenstein 3D was specifically written for a very specific MS-DOS development environment, and this caused a lot of problems further down the line when ports to other platforms were demanded. *Doom* learned from this by being a lot more portable, being written largely in system-agnostic C with support for multiple operating systems (DOS and NeXTSTEP) right from the word go. (I'd highly recommend Fabien Sanglard's *Game Engine Black Books* if you're interested in the specifics of *Wolfenstein*'s and *Doom*'s programming.) The official source code release in 1997 opened the doors to further development and documentation, and the last little bits of friction have since been smoothed out by the community, resulting in a clean, well-documented, mature codebase to play with. Which is great, if depressingly uncommon among classic games.

Here's the big question: what is your favourite example of *Doom* running on an unusual device?

It's a hard question, but I think my favourite one I've seen was the folks who ported *Doom* and MAME to lumpy old Nineties digital cameras that used a shared operating system. It's that wonderful combination of 'patently ridiculous' and 'actually probably pretty playable' that gets me. As far as homebrew ports I've actually played myself, the Nintendo DS port was a great little combination of playable and portable that brilliantly dedicated one of the two screens to the automap, showing actual attention to the system's unique functionality beyond just getting the game running.

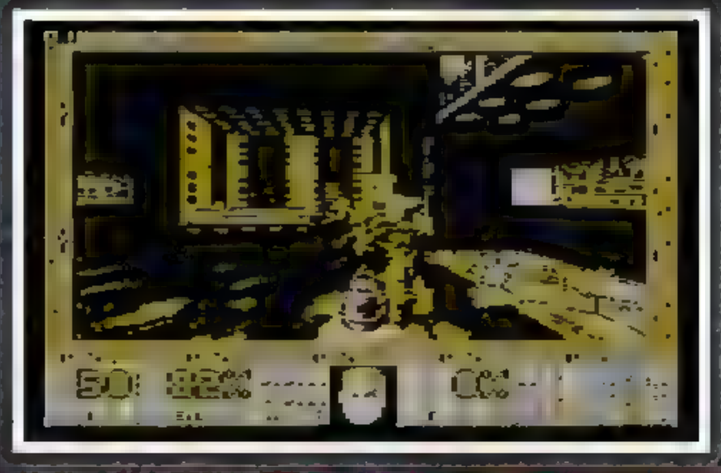


CHAINSAW

George Meriocco's 'Painsaw' is a creation that makes the list more for being a brilliant novelty than a technical marvel. The game itself is running on a Raspberry Pi Zero, using the Chocolate Doom source port. This, along with an LCD screen, was embedded into an Echo Junior toy chainsaw with a bloody new paint job.

POCKET CHIP

Okay, we're tooting our own horns here. Back when this tiny all-in-one Linux computer launched in 2016, our former sister magazine *Gadget* challenged us to demonstrate its retro gaming potential. We quickly got it running a variety of games including *Doom*, and ended up gaining a little bit of social media attention.



COMMODORE 64

Yes, you can play *Doom* on the greatest of all the 8-bit computers – but only if you have a SuperCPU, and don't mind playing in four colours with a single-digit framerate. This port was designed by AmiDog and was more useful as an experiment to test a MIPS recompiler, rather than an attempt to make a playable game.

retro GAMER

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THE MAKING OF

Gauntlet

The Deeper Dungeons

Dare you join Warrior, Valkyrie, Wizard and Elf in The Deeper Dungeons? That was the challenge issued by US Gold when it released a brand new set of levels for its hit Gauntlet conversion. But these were no ordinary dungeons...

WORDS BY MARTYN CARROLL

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** US GOLD
- **DEVELOPER:** GREMLIN BIRMINGHAM
- **RELEASED:** 1987
- **PLATFORM:** C64, AMSTRAD CPC, ZX SPECTRUM, MSX, ATARI 8-BIT
- **GENRE:** MAZE GAME

Atari's *Gauntlet* was a memorable arcade game for many reasons, but there was one feature that would have a lasting impact on the industry. In a bid to boost takings, project leader Ed Logg engineered a four-player experience where players could feed in coins to prolong play, and crucially, new players could rock up and join a game that was already in-progress. This 'buy-in' feature would quickly become commonplace in multiplayer arcade games.

There was no 'end' to *Gauntlet* – the levels just kept looping after a certain point – so part of the appeal was to see how long you could survive the dungeons on a single credit. This was lost on the home versions that followed, as you could continue ad infinitum providing one player stayed alive, but these releases sowed the seeds for something that, over time, would have an ever greater impact on the wider videogame industry.

Tucked away on the inlay to US Gold's home versions was a competition. The text read: "In early 1987, US Gold will release an expansion cassette for *Gauntlet* containing hundreds of new levels and treasure rooms. You have the chance to have your own maze included!" Instructions were provided on how players could devise and submit their own dungeon designs, with the lure of *Gauntlet* T-shirts as prizes. Sure enough, *Gauntlet: The Deeper Dungeons* soon arrived as a data tape/disk that required the original game to run (when the game asked you to flip the tape or disk over to load the levels, you inserted *The Deeper Dungeons* instead). It wasn't the first expansion pack, but it was certainly the first to popularise a concept that would become prevalent later on and manifest itself in the digital age as DLC.

The idea for *The Deeper Dungeons* arrived during the development of the original game. US Gold had hired Gremlin Graphics to undertake

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

GAUNTLET
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1986

MASK (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: C64, AMSTRAD CPC, ZX SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1988

SKATE CRAZY
SYSTEM: C64, AMSTRAD CPC, ZX SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1988

» [ZX Spectrum] One creator has added a traditional 'Hi mum!' message to their level.

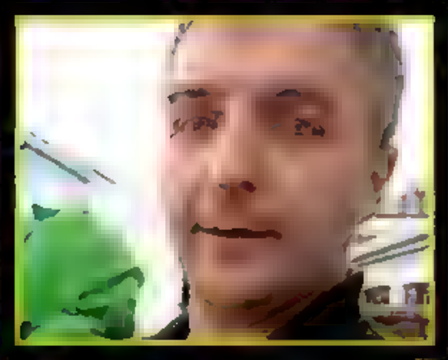
the conversions, and the team had relocated to US Gold's West Midlands base where they became known as Gremlin Birmingham. Programmer Stuart Gregg, who joined halfway through the development in a support role, remembers that the impetus came from the US Gold boss. "Geoff [Brown] came up with the idea, when he saw us using our *Gauntlet* map editor," he says, referring to the tool that Z80 programmer Tony Porter had created to simplify the process of adding all the maps to the different versions of the game. "He used to come and visit us more than a few times a day. I think having a development team in-house was a novelty for him and he enjoyed it."

On seeing how easy it was for the team to add levels using the editor (each level was a grid made up of 32x32 blocks, and it was simply a case of adding a wall, monster, item or other attribute to each block), Geoff figured that just about anyone could do it – and so the idea for an expansion filled with user-designed dungeons was born. The competition was added to the inlay and a steady flow of entries soon began to arrive at the office. The door to the Deeper Dungeons had opened.

The job of reviewing the entries and selecting which ones made the cut fell to graphics artist Kevin Bulmer. "Kev did most of the sorting, then we all got a chance to look through them," recalls Stuart. "Once the choices were made Kev and [6502 coder] Bill Allen did the bulk of the work, but we all did a few levels." Although no additional programming was involved, the job of entering the data remained, as did 'fixing' some of the wilder entries so that they functioned as working, completable levels.

» The game advertised a colossal 512 new levels, but in truth it was actually closer to half that number.

> "Geoff Brown came up with the idea when he saw us using our map editor"
> Stuart Gregg



» Chris Weirman, one of the lucky few whose devious dungeon was included in the expansion.

Lack of memory was the only real issue, as per usual. "The maps were packaged eight in a load," remembers Stuart, "and the biggest problem was making sure the levels were under a certain combined size. The game just loaded the next block of levels on the tape or disk so there wasn't that much to do. We planned it that way ahead of time so it was pretty easy for us to do *The Deeper Dungeons*."

The project may have been easy, but anyone who played the expansion knows that the new dungeons were anything but, with the challenge ranging from difficult to downright evil. Many levels were labyrinthine and filled with monster generators and poisoned food, and Death, that 200-health-harvesting bastard, was lurking around every corner. "We added purely what was submitted!", deflects Stuart when asked about the devious nature of the new levels.

COMPETITION RESULTS:

Many of the mazes in Gauntlet – The Deeper Dungeons are based upon competition entries received from hundreds of entrants throughout Europe. We have chosen ten winners, but unfortunately we cannot tell you which Dungeon was designed by which winner because Gauntlet presents the levels randomly.

The following talented Dungeon Architects will each receive a Gauntlet T-Shirt and a copy of the program for their computer.

L.W Nelson – Cranham, Upminster, Essex
M.Hutton – Newtown Mearns, Glasgow
A.Wallberg – Örebro, Sweden
I.Cox – Norton, Stourbridge
G.Reilly – Knowle, Bristol
R.Bell – Nantwich, Cheshire
C.Weirman – Llanelli
J.Spring – Ilford, Essex
I Abbott – Dunstable, Bedfordshire
A.Singers – Lockerbie, Dumfriesshire.

» The ten winners were immortalised on the inlay card. Each will have their own tale to tell of the competition.

CONVERSION CAPERS

WHICH VERSIONS ARE WORTH DELVING FOR?

ZX SPECTRUM

Compromises were made with the black backgrounds and character-width scroll, but this is an excellent version that delivers an authentic experience (the addition of AY sound helps here). Sadly, the expansion was never released on disk, so players had to faff about with the tape multiload.

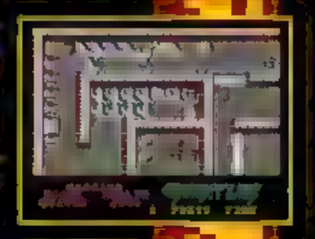
AMSTRAD CPC

Similar to the ZX Spectrum version, but with more colour and smoother scrolling which, visually at least, results in a closer approximation of the coin-op. The trade-off is that it runs a fair bit slower, particularly in some of the more manic dungeons. Still, a very accomplished effort.

MSX

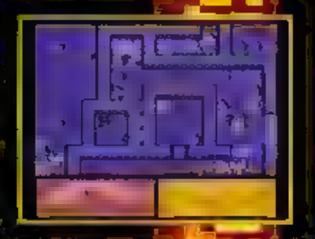
MSX owners were accustomed to getting dodgy coin-op conversions from western developers, but this is a pleasant surprise. It obviously shares code with the ZX Spectrum version, but it has been optimised for the hardware and the sprites benefit from extra colour.

COMMODORE 64



This gets our vote for the best version. It's fast and frantic and feels just right. The original game was blasted for being glitchy on release, but we didn't notice any issues when playing *The Deeper Dungeons*, suggesting that some bug fixes may have been included in the expansion.

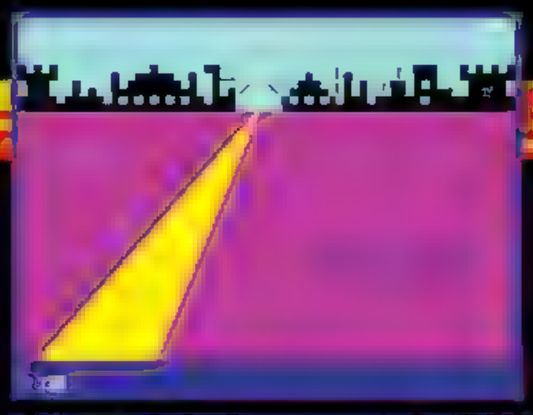
ATARI 8-BIT



Atari's 8-bit computer hardware was prehistoric compared to the 16-bit board used by the firm's coin-op division for *Gauntlet*, yet this home version ain't half bad. The visuals are muted and the action is sedate, meaning it plays quite differently, but you can't help but be impressed.

PLAYERS WIN PRIZES

MORE GAMES TIED TO COMPETITIONS



PIMANIA

■ In the first competition of its kind, Automata hid clues to the secret location of a golden sundial worth £6,000 in this bizarre text adventure from 1982. It was eventually found three years later by Sue Cooper and Luz Newman who located it in the mouth of the Litlington White Horse in Sussex.

JET SET WILLY

■ Software Projects put up a case of champers and a helicopter ride with Matt Smith to the first person to complete the game. Cameron Else and Ross Holman 'won', as they revealed that the game couldn't be completed due to bugs. Cameron later converted the *Willy* games to the MSX.

LORDS OF MIDNIGHT

■ Beyond proposed to turn the quest of the first person to defeat Doomdark into a published fantasy novel. The firm was caught off-guard however, as someone submitted a completed quest after just two weeks. The player was rewarded for their efforts but sadly the novel never materialised.

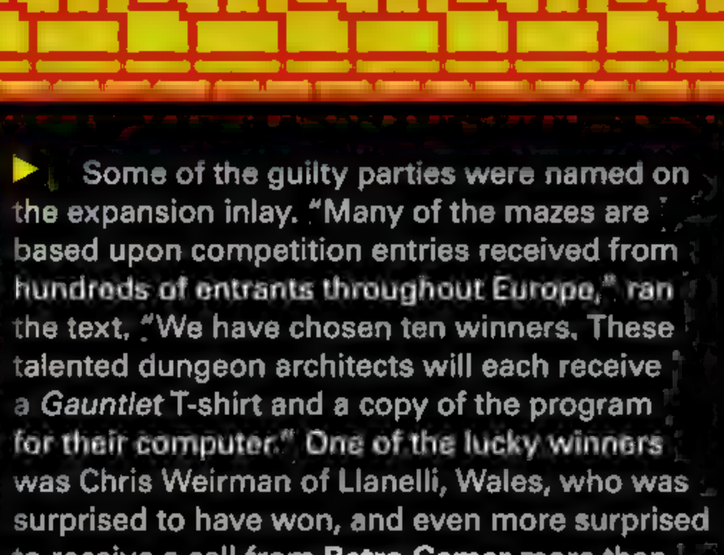
▶ Some of the guilty parties were named on the expansion inlay. "Many of the mazes are based upon competition entries received from hundreds of entrants throughout Europe," ran the text. "We have chosen ten winners. These talented dungeon architects will each receive a *Gauntlet* T-shirt and a copy of the program for their computer." One of the lucky winners was Chris Weirman of Llanelli, Wales, who was surprised to have won, and even more surprised to receive a call from **Retro Gamer** more than 30 years after the event.

Chris, who's now a technology director for a global materials manufacturer, was just 12 when he entered the competition. "I was an avid gamer back then and I loved playing *Gauntlet*, first in the arcades and then on my Spectrum," he tells us. "When I read about the chance to design a level I was really up for it. I remember asking my mum to get some squared paper and I sat down on the front room table to chew my pencil and try and create an impossible level."

Chris clearly spent some time on his level as he can still recall the layout. "I'm amazed how much I remember about it. I placed the start point in a corner with waves of Death characters coming in. Death could only be killed using a potion, so I did this to use up the player's potions before they had to negotiate a maze where the walls were the strongest ghost generators. You could shoot your way through the maze walls if you knew which direction the exit was but the spawn rate was high which made it slow, hard work. More Deaths were waiting within the maze so it turned out to be a pretty hard level. I also placed a risk and reward element as there were treasure chests hidden behind some more ghost generators."

With his nightmarish level finished, Chris eagerly posted it off to US Gold. "I guess I could have buried myself in levels before deciding on the one to enter, but my first attempt proved to be enough to win," he says. "I do

> "I sat down to chew my pencil and try and create an impossible level"
> Chris Weirman



» [ZX Spectrum] The enemy has amassed! Hey ho, just a typical day down in the Deeper Dungeons.

EUREKA!

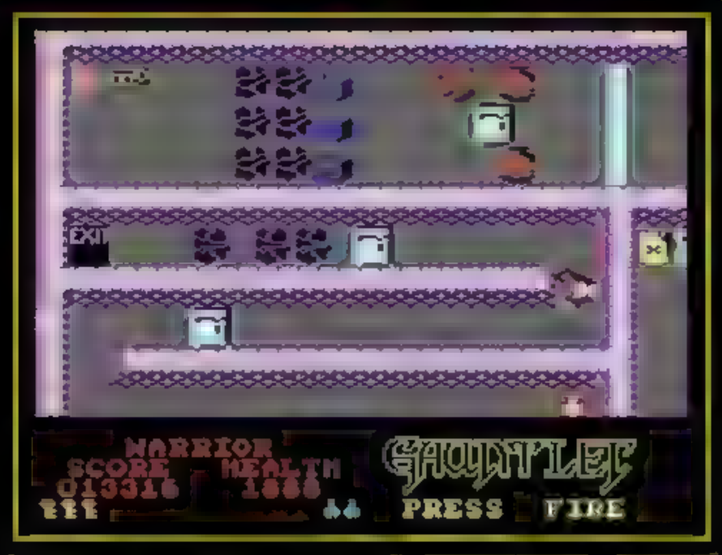
This adventure game devised by Ian Livingstone and published by Domark offered up "250K of pure mystery" and a massive £25,000 cash prize to the first person to solve it. The winner was 15-year-old Matt Woodley who claimed the cash and then went to work for Domark for many years.

MOON CRESTA

Incentive regularly offered prizes and for this conversion it created a high score competition where a *Moon Cresta* arcade cab was up for grabs. Anyone scoring more than 30,000 points could enter and the lucky winner picked out of the hat was Ian Clark of Newcastle. Wonder if he still owns it?

» [C64] As in the original game, the opening dungeon offers exits to levels two, four and eight.

» [Amstrad CPC] Brief respite can be found in treasure rooms, where you have to grab as much loot as you can.



» [C64] Nine Deaths instantly rush your starting position. Par for the course, really.

» [Amstrad CPC] We can see the exit from the start point, but something tells us we'll be taking the long way round.

remember getting something through the post to inform me of winning but I definitely didn't receive a T-shirt or a copy of the game. I put this down to me maybe not putting down my size and my computer type, but it was a shame I didn't get the prize. I did save up my pocket money and bought the game following its release many months later and saw my name on the inlay card. And I did find my dungeon, and yes I did complete it!"

Finding a specific dungeon isn't as straightforward as you might think, largely due to the way the game presents the levels. Each data block typically includes eight standard dungeons and two treasure rooms, but of these the player is only required to play three dungeons and one treasure room, and they are selected at random. This was done to provide a varied set of levels each time you played.

There's also a huge number of levels included. The game's advertising claimed there were 512, but this is a bit of a fib. On the ZX Spectrum (which should be representative for all versions, as the level data was platform independent), there are actually 247 dungeons and 53 treasure rooms, making a total of 300 levels. Furthermore, a number of levels (particularly treasure rooms) are repeated in different data blocks, so the number of unique levels is closer to 250. On the other hand, each level could be flipped horizontally, flopped vertically, and also flip-flopped, so if you were taking variations into account there were actually many more than the advertised 512.

The Deeper Dungeons was released during summer 1987 for multiple platforms – Spectrum, Commodore 64, Amstrad CPC, MSX and Atari 8-bit (an Atari ST version was advertised but never released). As it required the original *Gauntlet* to run it was a cut-price release, costing £4.99 on tape and £6.99 on disk. The press reaction was warm to hot: most mags rated it around the 7/10 mark, while *Your Commodore* and *Atari User* awarded it 9/10. A couple of commentators bemoaned the lack of innovation, with one suggesting that features from the recently-released *Gauntlet II* coin-op could have been added, but it was blatantly obvious that US Gold had separate plans in that regard. Having completed *The Deeper Dungeons*, the same team moved on to the *Gauntlet II* conversion job (where Stuart took responsibility for coding the C64 version).

The sequel superseded the previous games thanks to a number of new gameplay features, but *The Deeper Dungeons* would live on. US Gold had included the original Gauntlet on its 1987 compilation Solid Gold, so when it needed another coin-op conversion for its next collection, *Arcade Force Four*, it opted for *The Deeper Dungeons*. So the game *was* released in standalone format, albeit as part of a compilation. Years later in 1992, *Gauntlet*, *The Deeper Dungeons* and *Gauntlet II* were bundled together as one of the 'Multimixx' packs (which saw US Gold wringing the last few dimes from the dying 8-bit market).

For Stuart and the Gremlin Birmingham team, this was just another job – an interesting one, but a job nonetheless. But for Chris and all the others players who had their creations included in a commercial release it was clearly something more. "US Gold really led the charge with player interaction with the competition," says Chris. "Overall it was a lovely exercise and I was thrilled to have won."

And for the rest of us, *The Deeper Dungeons* ushered in the concept of the videogame expansion; for better, for worse. None of the versions acknowledge the level creators in the actual game – except for the Amstrad CPC release. Here, having loaded in the expansion, a simple message is displayed on-screen: "Welcome to The Deeper Dungeons. These are your levels. Enjoy them!" ★

NES Max

» **PLATFORM:** NES » **RELEASED:** 1988
» **COST:** ¥5,800 (launch), £15+ (now, boxed), £5+ (now, unboxed)

The NES Max is a real oddity – it's an official pad that's radically different from the regular pack-in NES controller, which is advanced in some ways but awkward and unwieldy in others. The first thing to note is the shape of the device. Where the regular NES controller offers no concessions to ergonomics whatsoever, the NES Max is slightly curved and offers extended hand grips that make it significantly more comfortable to hold. Nintendo didn't carry these features forward to the SNES controller, opting to use a less radical design that still improved player comfort, but extended hand grips became a common feature of game controllers from the mid-Nineties onwards.

The turbo fire buttons on the controller were a pretty standard inclusion, the cycloid d-pad replacement was pretty radical, and appears to point the way to the Circle Pad used on the 3DS. But while it looks like an analogue input, it's still a four-way digital input device and the most reliable results come from just pushing down on the black outer ring. Still, the controller has become popular with hardware modders, who like to add analogue sticks to create a NES controller with a decidedly modern feel. ★

NES Max fact

■ Because Nintendo employed a basic form of region-locking on its controllers, owners of PAL consoles may wish to check for a sticker reading 'NESP-027 PAL' on the rear of the controller to ensure compatibility.

ESSENTIAL GAME

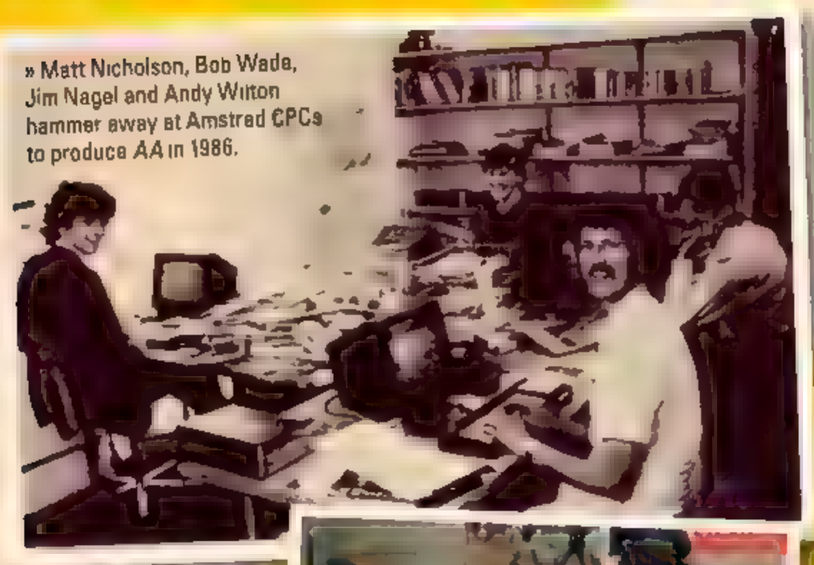
1943: THE BATTLE OF MIDWAY

Capcom's arcade conversion is one of the better NES shoot-'em-ups, a pretty faithful recreation of the original which offers an interesting twist by allowing you to upgrade your plane. Many games of the genre allow you to just hold the fire button for continuous shots, but *1943* doesn't due to the inclusion of a charged shot option. This is where the game really benefits from the inclusion of the dedicated turbo fire buttons of the NES Max controller, as it's possible to employ both rapid fire and charged shots easily – something you couldn't do if you constantly had to toggle a turbo switch.

THE MAKING OF

AMSTRAD ACTION

WORDS BY DAVID CROOKES



» Matt Nicholson, Bob Wade, Jim Nagel and Andy Wilton hammer away at Amstrad CPCs to produce *AA* in 1986.

» Ed tor Rod Lawton looks on as staff wr ter Adam Peters discusses page design with art assistant Maryanne Booth

IT WASN'T AN OFFICIAL PUBLICATION BUT FUTURE'S FIRST MAGAZINE BECAME A BESTSELLER, COVERING THE AMSTRAD CPC FOR TEN GLORIOUS YEARS AND STICKING WITH IT THROUGH THICK AND THIN

In *Amstrad Action*'s debut, the magazine's first editor, Pete Connor, gave readers a glimpse into how the publication was put together. Thousands of words were initially typed into Amstrad CPCs. "Then our glorious prose is piped down a speaking tube on something called a modem," he wrote. "Back come reams of print-covered paper which we lick and slap down on cardboard. Out with the box-camera, a few hours of exposure and then it's all sent by packhorse to a printer."

If that sounds rather quaint, it was – certainly by today's production methods. There was no packhorse but the writers did indeed hammer their words into an Amstrad CPC 464 connected to a colour screen or a green-monitored CPC 664. They'd use the word processor Tasword, later upgrading to WordStar, and only after the first issue was put to bed did they get three Amstrad CPC 6128s – two used by the writers and the third by the fledgling admin team.

Yet for Chris Anderson, the magazine's publisher and founder, it was the beginning of a dream. The Oxford graduate had edited *Personal Computer Games* and launched *Zzap!64*, but his decision to set up Future Publishing and create a new magazine using a £15,000 bank loan was a big step for the 28-year-old burgeoning businessman. The magazine initially operated from Chris' house and later moved to an office behind a garage in the tight streets of picturesque Somerton. That first issue, dated October 1985, was created in three months. ▶

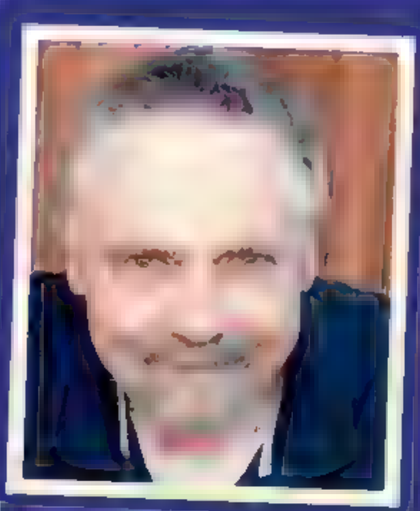
WHERE ARE THEY NOW

CHRIS ANDERSON

With Future flourishing, Chris moved to the US in 1994 and founded Imagine Media. By 1999, he merged Imagine with Future and took the combined company public. His nonprofit organisation, the Sapling Foundation, acquired TED in 2001 and Chris left Future to run it.

STEVE CAREY

Having edited *ST Format*, Steve took publishing responsibility for magazines such as *Amiga Power*, *PC Gamer* and *Edge*. After being a director at Future Publishing until 1998, he moved to Australia and worked on more magazines before becoming a business mentor and consultant.

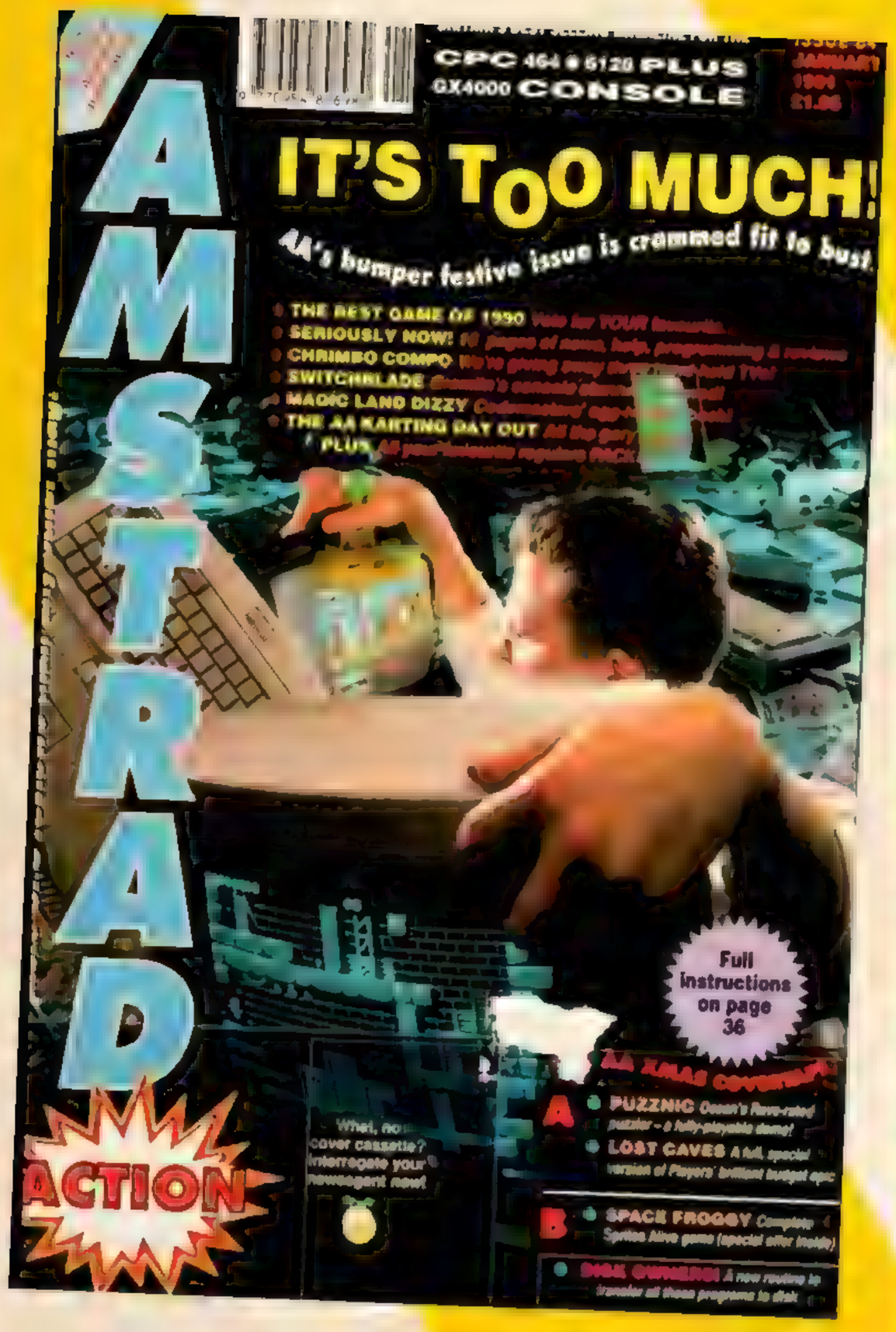


ROD LAWTON

Rod took some time away from Future Publishing and worked as a freelance journalist specialising in photography, technology and computing. He returned and became technique editor on *N-Photo* and an editor on *TechRadar*. He is currently the Group Reviews Editor of Future's Photography division.

STUART WHYTE

Stuart went to work for Microprose as a producer of console games, moving on to Bullfrog Productions, Lionhead Studios and Supermassive Games. He looked to set up a new developer in 2016 but he's currently director of VR Product Development at PlayStation London Studio.



» Adam Waring not only featured on the cover of issue 64, his game, *Lost Caves*, was on the cover tape

EMBARKING ON A CRAZY ADVENTURE

THE STORY BEHIND AMSTRAD ACTION'S REGULAR COLUMNISTS

Adventure games were a key component of *AA* from the beginning when the genre was covered by Steve Cooke who wrote under the pseudonym 'The Pilgrim'. The columns would be a mix of news, reviews and tips – or 'clue sniffing' – and they were so popular that, when Steve moved on to edit *ACE* magazine, he had to be replaced.

Stuart Whyte stepped into his shoes, writing the column as 'The Balrog'. He'd been named the Pilgrim Adventurer of the Year 1989 in issue 45 and was felt to be an ideal replacement, despite being just 18 years old. "I'd actually written my first column as The Pilgrim in issue 49 but Steve wasn't too happy so I had to come up with a new pseudonym. I was a massive fan of *Lord Of The Rings* and The Pilgrim has mentioned having a pet Balrog. I liked the idea of the pet eating the master and taking over his job".

He wanted to keep his own identity secret, "in part because my telephone number had appeared multiple times in the 'Lords And Ladies Of Adventure' section and I didn't want to have more people phoning me up". Stuart would write his columns at home on the Amstrad CPC word processor Protext and post a three-inch disk with his work to the office. "People really responded to the idea of a Balrog reviewing adventures and would write to me with this in mind – I had people offering their kid sisters for me to eat, people asking me what my favourite part of the dungeon was and so on. I think a particular highlight was when I did the 'Draw The Balrog' competition – the readers excelled themselves for this!"

When the Graphic Adventure Creator was given away on the covertape, there was a miniature boom in games, and a competition was set up with the winner, *Who's Afraid Of The Balrog?*, ending up on a future cassette. Stuart Whyte ended up writing for 44 issues of *Amstrad Action* but left as the output from companies such as Level 9, Infocom and Magnetic Scrolls dwindled. Stuart had also become a PC gamer so the column was handed to stalwart adventurer Debby Howard. "I was super happy that the column was going to someone who had the passion," says Stuart.

RICHARD FAIRHURST

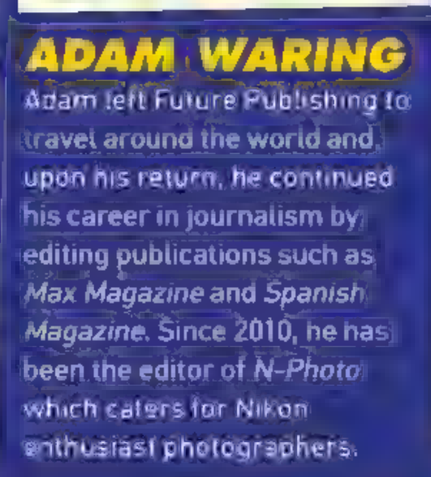
Through writing for *AA*, journalism became Richard's career. He worked for mags full-time after leaving university and he became editor of *Waterscape.com* as well as *Waterways World* and *Heritage* magazines. An OpenStreetMap activist, he is now the editor and founder of the website *cycle.travel*.

DAVE GOLDER

After editing *Ultimate Future Games*, Dave Golder helped to launch the sci-fi magazine *SFX* in 1995 with Matt Bielby, becoming editor in 1996. He left in 2005 but returned as online editor and today he works as a freelance writer and media specialist.

ADAM PETERS

Adam moved back to London after leaving *AA* and worked on *Sega Zone* and *Game Zone*, which Future bought and moved to Bath. He left to embark on a career writing and producing children's TV instead of journalism, and he has been largely doing that ever since.



ADAM WARING

Adam left Future Publishing to travel around the world and, upon his return, he continued his career in journalism by editing publications such as *Max Magazine* and *Spanish Magazine*. Since 2010, he has been the editor of *N-Photo*, which caters for Nikon enthusiast photographers.

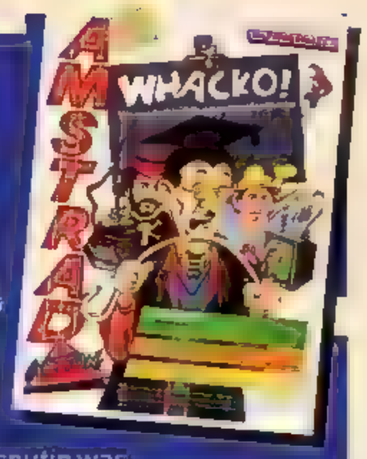
SIMON FORRESTER

After *Amstrad Action*, Simon edited *Commodore Format*, taking it to the final issue in October 1995. He left Future Publishing in 1998 and worked in digital marketing and web development. He's now a software developer for Mituyu, a marketing and advertising company in Bath.

ESSENTIAL ISSUES

ISSUE 7

With a whopping – and never beaten – 124 pages, *Amstrad Action* had firmly ridden out its shaky start. Bob Wade visited Mastertronic, Action Test had some colour pages (ahh, those screenshots), *Rasputin* was awarded the Master Game and there were loads of *Elite* tips. Plus a look at educational software – which surely appeased parents.



"EVEN WITH A MORIBUND MARKET LIKE THE AMSTRAD, FILLING THE MAG WASN'T HARD AND THE BIG DECISIONS WERE ABOUT WHAT TO LEAVE OUT"

Steve Carey

The small team was strong. Software editor Bob Wade had worked with Chris Anderson on both of his previous magazines. Responsibility for design was handed to Trevor Gilham who devised the magazine's vertical logo. Up the road was an advanced typesetter called Wordsmiths to which the *Amstrad Action* team would transmit text down the phone line and then drive over to pick up the finished bromide paper. When the typesetter got an Amstrad PCW, the staff would physically take over a three-inch disk containing the words and wait for the results before handing them over to the designer.

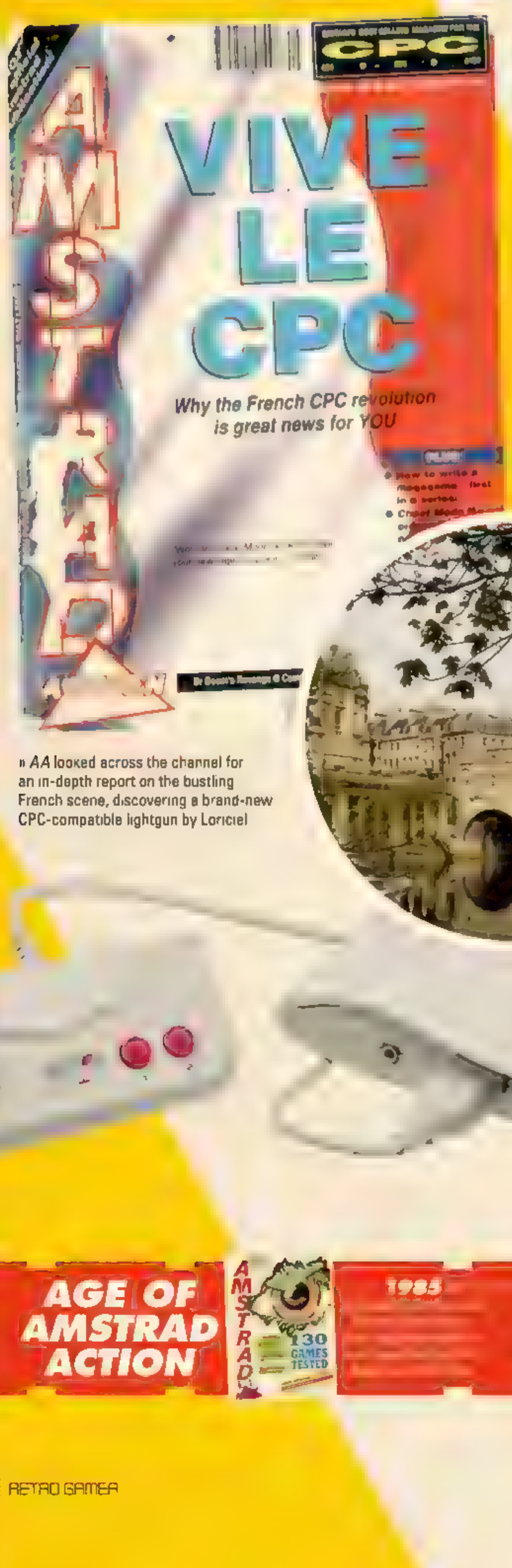
There had been hiccups along the way. Amstrad objected to the name *Amstrad Action* (*AA*) and suggested *'Action On The Amstrad CPC Computer'* (it thankfully relented). Newsfield also announced potential rival *Amtix* would be launched at the same time. Yet that first *Amstrad Action* nailed some of the regular sections that would become a staple of the magazine for years to come, from the bustling news pages of Amscene and the popular adventure column by The Pilgrim (aka Steve Cooke) to Cheat Mode and the reviews within Action Test where the first Master Game was given to *The Way Of The Exploding Fist*.

From the start, *AA* aimed itself at both a serious crowd and gamers, striving to strike the perfect balance. Initial sales, however, were poor and it took a giveaway of two previously unreleased Ocean games (*Kung Fu* and *Number 1*) to save the magazine and the company from going under. They appeared on issue four's covertape, doubling sales. The future suddenly looked very bright.

As more mags were launched, the company moved five minutes away to The Old Barn and, for the next year, *AA* saw editors coming and going (Matt Nicholson helmed for six issues, Jim Nagel for two and Chris Anderson for one). Nevertheless, it was establishing itself as the number one CPC mag. "It was so exciting to be part of Future Publishing back then," says Steve Carey who was production editor of *PC Plus* which launched in 1986. "Chris Anderson, as you know, is a genius and the company really took off."

AA covered the PCW for a short spell, ending before Bob Wade was in the editor's chair with issue 17. Bob and Trevor freshened *AA*'s look, altering the game ratings boxes and brightening the pages and, when Steve took over in August 1988, with Future now in Bath, he vowed to make only a few tweaks. "*AA* was a fine magazine that didn't need fixing," Steve Carey tells us. "It was also my first editorship and I was proud as anything."

The CPC wasn't the most buoyant of computer scenes, however. "But even with a moribund market like the Amstrad, filling the mag wasn't hard and the big decisions were about what to leave out," Steve says. To keep things fresh, Steve brought in Emma Broadley, whose outspoken comments and observations split opinion. "Emma Broadley wasn't real," confesses Steve. "She was actually



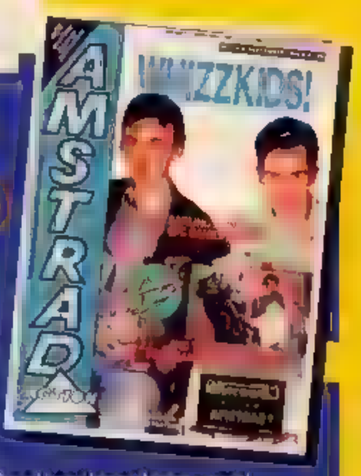
» *AA* looked across the channel for an in-depth report on the bustling French scene, discovering a brand-new CPC-compatible lightgun by Loriciel

ESSENTIAL ISSUES

ISSUE 36

WHIZZERS WITH CHIPS

Notable more perhaps for having had the wrong number printed on the cover – 35 instead of 36 – but the issue also featured the Darling brothers and the Oliver twins on the cover, leading to a lively interview inside. *The Bard's Tale* achieved the Master Game and Niall Brady's *Arkanoid* cheat gave readers ten new screens to play.



AGE OF AMSTRAD ACTION

1985 1985 1986

1986 1987 1987 1987

» The *AA* team dressed up for a bizarre panto photoshoot in issue 76, dated January 1992, with Adam Peters writing the story

my missus who I got to write as the 'voice of the people' and she was named after the Broadley Arms, a pub around the corner."

Trenton Webb became the new games reviewer. "He was great to have around and I don't think he realised how good he was," Steve says. Codemasters games developer Adam Waring was hired as the new technical editor. "Steve got in touch with Codemasters and asked them if they knew anyone suitable for the role and they put my name forward," Adam says. "I guess Codemasters felt that I was expendable."

Adam was an avid reader of *AA* and he'd seen the magazine's 'no prisoners' approach to reviews – *AA* had, after all, awarded US Gold's top seller *World Cup Carnival* 0% in issue 11. "It was a shameless reskin of an old Arctic Computing budget title that was still on sale for 99p and it was the official game of the *Mexico '86 World Cup*," he recalls. "US Gold sold it for ten quid or so. Guess who did the reskin..."

Adam, however, was the reviewer who dished out *AA*'s joint highest ever score, awarding *Rick Dangerous II* 97% in November 1990. "Much of the job involved playing games all day and often for far longer than was required to write the review. The biggest culprit would be *Laser Squad*, a brilliant turn-based strategy game by Julian Gollop. We'd have a CPC running it in the corner pretty much constantly and take our turns throughout the day between doing real work."

A good chunk of Adam Waring's job was covering the serious side of the CPC. He'd learned to program in Z80 machine code on a Spectrum and worked with CPCs at Artic. Adam ended up staying for 34 issues and he was there throughout the long reign of the next editor, Rod Lawton, who certainly put humour centre stage.

"I always felt personality was important," Rod tells us, "and the worst thing a magazine can do is be boring. Adam Waring brought a very light tone to the technical content in the magazine which made a big difference, and Trenton's commitment to games and reviewing was amazing – he was quite a diplomat with the PR companies, too. But Ollie Alderton, *AA*'s art editor, masterminded some of the best covers we ever had and made sure we ate enough beer and chips to keep us grounded."

Ollie worked up from being Trevor's art assistant and produced pages for the magazine for four years. He designed the September 1990 issue, heralding the launch of Amstrad's GX4000 console and Plus computers, but if *AA* was expecting the machines to widen its appeal, poor sales would lead to disappointment.

"The machines looked great but it felt too late," says Rod. "The writing was on the wall ▶

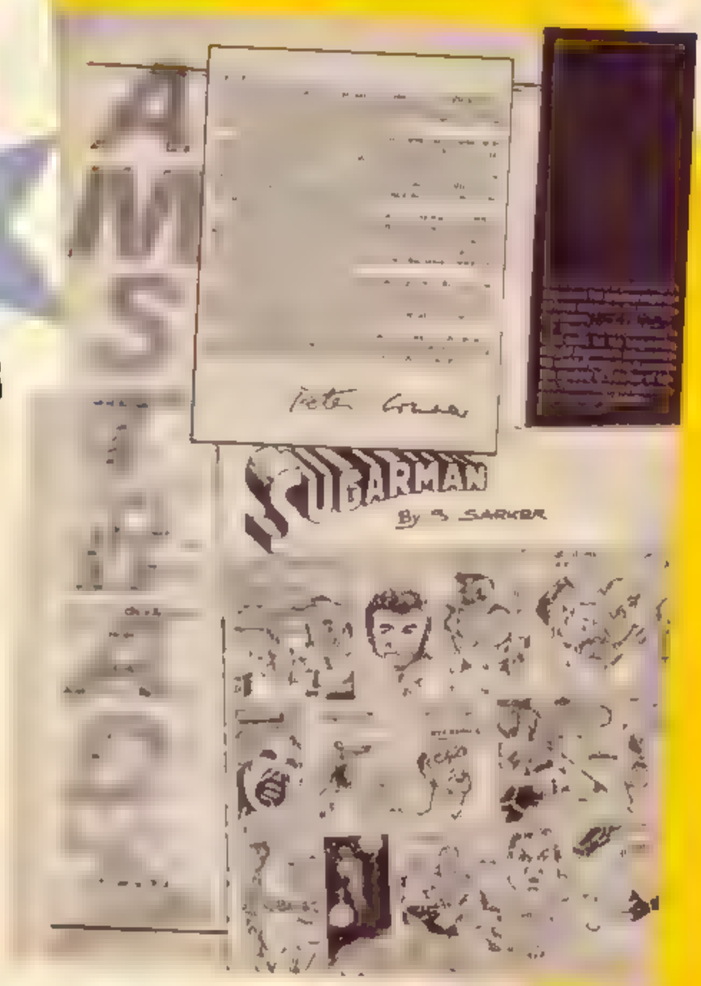
ESSENTIAL ISSUES

ISSUE 49

LASER SHARP

To celebrate its fourth birthday, *AA* popped a fully playable mission of *Shinobi* on the covertape, and awarded *Laser Squad* its Master Game. It also revealed why it didn't review *Last Ninja 2* and *RoboCop*: the former was "the biggest loads of old rubbish since *Psycho Pigs UXB*" and Ocean didn't send the team the latter

» Sugarman, which turned Alan Sugar into a heroic comic character, made his debut in issue six



ESSENTIAL ISSUES

ISSUE 60

CONSOLES ARE COMING

Amstrad stole a march on its rivals with full coverage of the ill-fated GX4000 console and new updated CPCs – the 464 Plus and 6128 Plus. As well as previewing forthcoming cartridges, *AA* gave *Burnin' Rubber* 100% for graphics. *Rick Dangerous II* was 'megapreviewed' over a single page, too (it went on to get 97%)

for 8-bit computers by then so it felt like a last-ditch effort by Amstrad to squeeze some sales out of existing tech, but I did get to go to Paris for the launch and have dinner on the Eiffel Tower during a thunderstorm."

Ollie was also involved throughout the era of wacky photoshoots such as the *AA* Christmas panto, which had art assistant Maryanne Booth as Cinderella, Rod as Emintrude Ugly, Adam Waring as Hattersley Ugly and new staff writer Adam Peters as Gemima Ugly. "The photoshoots were probably the best, such as me having to sit for an hour underneath a trestle table piled high with readers' letters with just my arm sticking through and holding one aloft," says Rod. "We also came up with some great cover ideas which we probably wouldn't be able to do now because they were slightly mad and not always very cheap."

Most of the photoshoot ideas were Adam Peters'. "I admired the fact Rod would happily go along with whatever stupid suggestion I came up with, such as him and me wrestling for a games review," he says. Adam Peters first appeared in December 1988 on a page called 'Day In The Life' which allowed readers to discuss what they used their CPC for. "Instead, I just bitched about the poor customer service of one of *AA*'s advertisers whilst posing in black lipstick embracing my 6128." It earned him £50 ("or in my currency, 50 pints of Becks at the student union bar"), gained him more freelance and landed him a job.

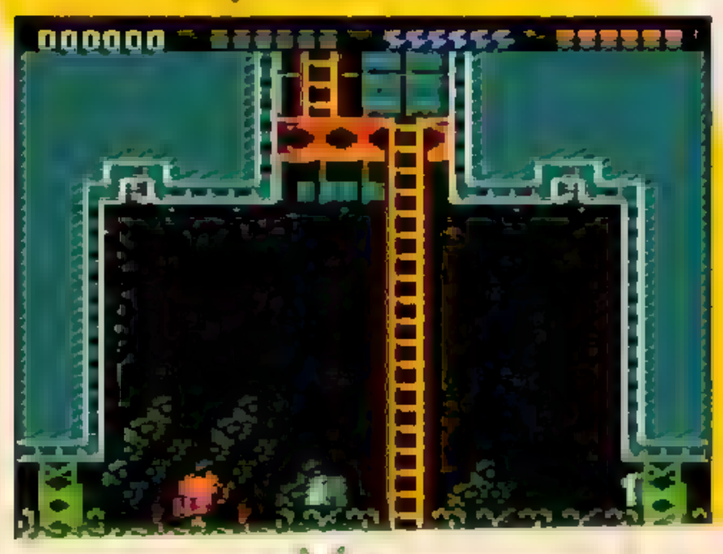
"I ADMIRED THE FACT ROD WOULD GO ALONG WITH WHATEVER STUPID SUGGESTION I CAME UP WITH, SUCH AS HIM AND ME WRESTLING FOR A REVIEW"
Adam Peters

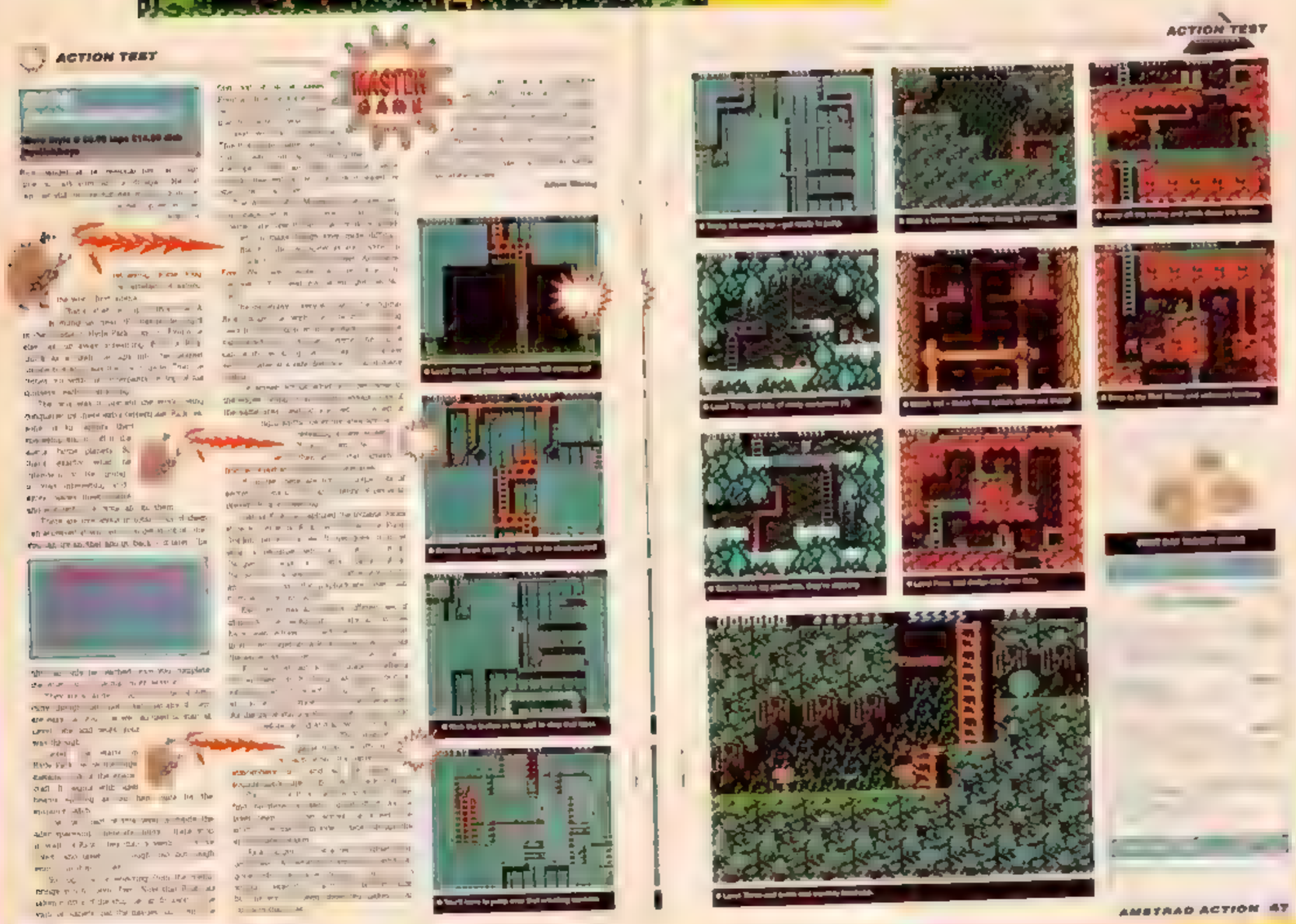
"I was in this huge building with advertising departments and publishers and all these other groups and layers that went into the production of the magazine," Adam Peters continues. "Rod dealt with all those people, tutting and sighing to me about these folk setting parameters for the three people (him, me and a graphic designer) working full-time to create the mag."

Future now had 19 magazines, 14 of them computer titles, and it occupied four buildings in central Bath. The magazine was produced on Apple Macs using QuarkXPress and printed on a laser typesetting Linotronic machine. There were a couple of CPC 6128s and a CPC 464 connected to a disc drive for testing programs and playing games. Rather than use a Multiface device to grab images (as was previously the case), one of two 6128 Plus machines would be connected to a Mac screen-grabber.

Adam Peters was given a lot of freedom. He'd plan the issues and reply to readers' letters in the most offbeat of ways (giving particularly opinionated readers such as Peter Worley their own regular slots). "*AA* had a somewhat polarised readership," Adam says. "On the one hand, you had kids and teens whose parents had bought them a CPC to do their school work, but who were only really interested in games. Then you had that middle-aged hobbyist crowd who were mostly using theirs to do the accounts for their doorknob polishing business or whatever. Of course, some people straddled both camps, but that need to engage two very different audiences was always driving the overall feel of the magazine."

Adam admits to being "pretty rubbish" at games, giving him a cynical take towards gaming: "Basically, I approached game reviews from the perspective of a game-hating spreadsheet addict, whilst covering the non-games side from the perspective of a 14-year-old platform gamer." The team would also field phone calls every Tuesday afternoon. "We'd always get at least one prank call from the older brother of a reader – 'Amstrads are shit, Amigas rule' or some such. The 1992 equivalent of





» *Amstrad Action* gave *Rick Dangerous II* a whopping 97% – its joint highest ever score with *Lemmings*

ISSENTIAL ISSUES

ISSUE 68

THINK OF THE CHILDREN

Despite having four Master Game reviews to get giddy over – *Total Recall*, *BAT*, *Switchblade* and *F-16* – some readers were more concerned over the inclusion of *How To Be A Complete Bastard* on the covertape. "*Amstrad Action* is not, and never has been, a magazine devoted to children," responded Rod Lawton two issues later.

1991 1991 1992 1992 1992 1992 1992 1993

internet trolling, I guess, so we tried to bridge that reader/writer gap and create a community. A support group. A gang. Whatever."

There was certainly a can-do mindset to the magazine. "When we got a letter from a reader telling us shops in France had loads more CPC games than our shops, the response was simple," Adam recalls. "Two days later, Rod and I were heading down the M4 towards Dover so even if the reader turned out to be lying we'd be sorted for duty free Camembert. You say 'can-do attitude', I say '35p bottles of Sauvignon'."

Amstrad Action began to take on a fanzine feel and circulation was rising. The writers believed readers were very much aware the CPC market was not buoyant. "Our publisher complained when I wrote a piece about how few games and programs were coming out, saying we shouldn't be suggesting the machine was dying, but the readers weren't stupid," Adam Peters affirms. "They could see what was on the shelves in WHSmith, where you had to crawl to some darkened ground level corner to find five rubbish games and Mini Office II in the not-even-labelled Amstrad section."

AA therefore became the glue for a growing indie scene and among those taking on a greater role was software developer Richard Fairhurst, who ran a public domain library called *Robot PD*. "When Adam Waring left, *AA* needed a new technical writer and they'd seen the programs I'd written for *Robot PD* and the columns I'd written for a CPC fanzine called *Artificial Intelligence*," he says.

Richard Fairhurst was well-connected. When Linda Barker took over from Rod Lawton for a month before passing on to Tim Norris for five months and eventually Dave Golder for the longer term, Richard increasingly drew on his contacts. "I'd be writing about PD, demos from Europe and indie productions by friends like Richard Wildey and Rob Buckley because that's literally all that was still available," Richard continues. "Without enthusiastic contributors, *AA* would have run out of things to write about."

Richard encouraged his friend Simon Forrester to apply for the job of staff writer which he began on his 19th birthday in 1993. Simon became a key part of *Amstrad Action*, particularly under Dave Golder. "I relied very heavily on my brilliant team to make me look good," Dave says. "I think Simon Forrester would happily back me up and agree I was 'winging it'."

There was certainly less material about. "It was difficult in comparison to the other computer magazines at Future, as obviously if new software is being released, you have more to write about," says Simon. "That said, there were still a few games coming out in 1992/1993, when I joined, though, there was a heavier reliance on the scene rather than an industry."

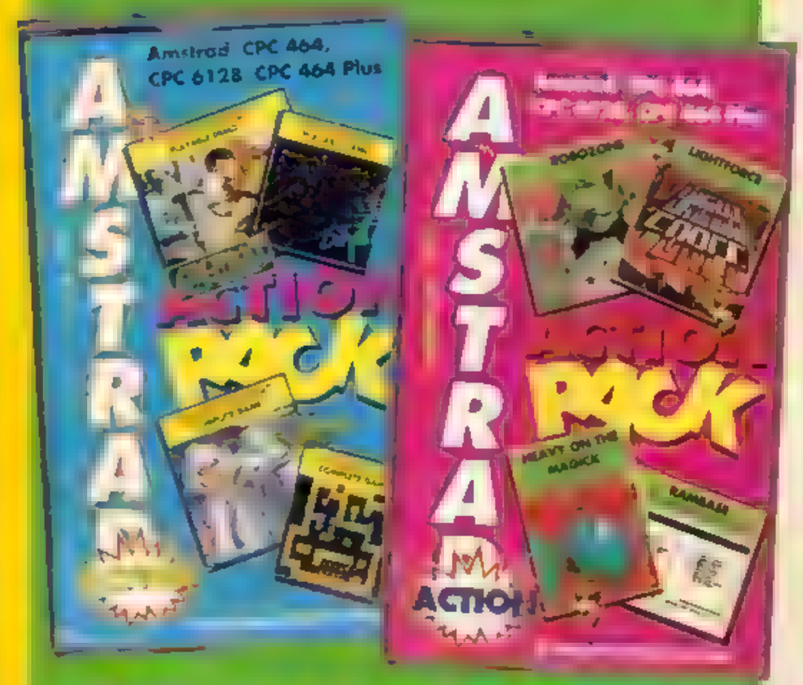
More and more, the magazine lived on its wits. "I seem to remember that cancellation always seemed to be about six months down the line, and the real challenge was to seeing how long we could keep the magazine viable," Dave says. "A lot of that was down to encouraging a clubby feel. There was a blitz mentality, I think."

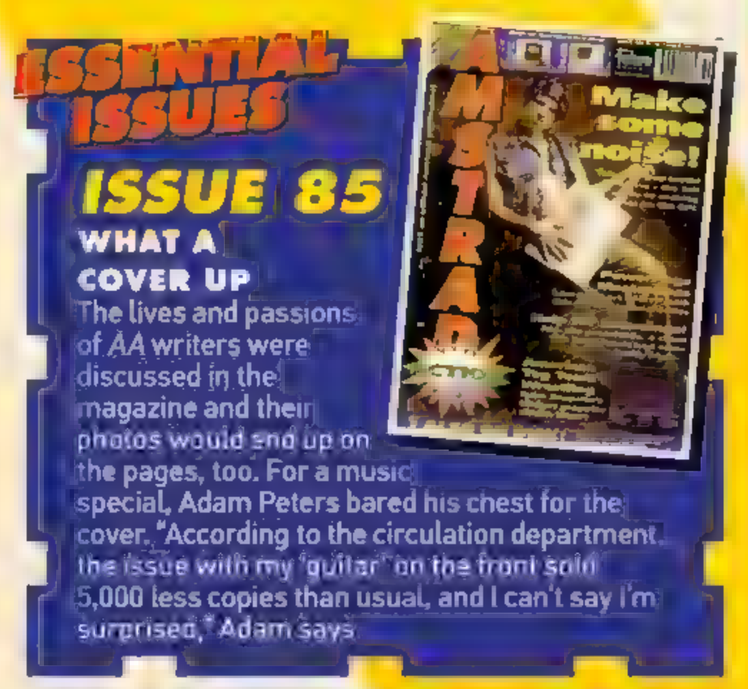
This brought its own difficulties. The homebrew and demo scene had its fair share of fallouts and politics but it was more reliable than the virtually-dead commercial sector. *AA* was caught out by US Gold's announcement of *Street Fighter II* for the CPC and it ran numerous teasers. "I know we pissed a few readers off who thought we should have called US Gold's bluff a long time before we eventually gave up on it," says Dave. The game never arrived.

Even so, the humour remained intact. "That was a fundamental part of *AA*'s style and overall it was a great laugh," highlights Simon. Sadly, humour and the scene couldn't sustain the magazine and the circulation plummeted as fast as the page count.

Dave tried to be proactive. Rob – whose Plus-only platformer *Fluff* graced the cover of issue 103 – remembers receiving a phone call urging him to create an alternative fighting game called *Lethal Moves* ("I don't recall it, but it sounds like something I'd encourage," says Dave Golder) but it was all too late. Tim Norris took over for a solitary issue when Dave finished up in October 1994 and Karen Levell took over. *AA* limped on to its end in June 1995 with an issue that promised an issue 118 which never arrived.

"A few of us briefly considered rounding up the copy already written and doing a DIY final issue, but it wouldn't have been worth the hassle," says Richard Fairhurst. *Amstrad Action* – Future's first magazine – was consigned to the past, but its mark will be forever felt. ✱





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Pit-Fighter

IT'S NO FINE WINE

» RETROREVIVAL

» ARCADE » 1990 » ATARI GAMES

It's easy to be impressed by graphics. After all, they're typically the first thing you see whenever you encounter a new game, and even today we put stock in how good a game looks. *Pit-Fighter* was an alluring game when it made its debut in Quay Amusements in Poole and everyone was lining up to play it, myself included. You have to remember that one-on-one fighting games had yet to explode in popularity (both *Street Fighter II* and *Mortal Kombat* were some way off at this point), so visual innovation often trumped actual gameplay. My friends were impressed by how lifelike *Pit-Fighter* looked compared to other available fighting games, and even I was suckered in by its seemingly realistic digitised visuals. It was making a lot of noise at Quay Amusements, and for many it was *the* fighting game to play.

Of course, I soon realised that just because something looks amazing, it doesn't mean the game's mechanics would be up to the same standard, and *Pit-Fighter* was one of the first big arcade games where I was able to look behind the glossy presentation and flashy visuals to realise that what was underneath was mechanically rather poor and basic. I'd always play as Kato, because he had the coolest looking moves, but he was also quite crudely animated and had a tough fight on his hands when up against *Pit-Fighter*'s more difficult opponents.

I bullishly stuck with him, though, and I admit that despite its basic-ness I did have a soft spot for Atari's brawler at the time of its release. There's a tight brutality to *Pit-Fighter* that never really translated across to most of the home versions, and its gritty underground atmosphere felt quite novel at the time, too. Throwing a motorbike at someone or cracking a bar stool across their back always made me laugh, while the viciousness of the crowd helped separate *Pit-Fighter* further from its peers. It hasn't aged particularly well, but that's okay, not all games can remain perfect (except for *Strider*, of course). ✱

THE MAKING OF GET DEXTER 2

Although Get Dexter wowed gamers and topped the Amstrad charts, its sequel didn't appear until two years later. Developer Rémi Herbulot explains how he pushed the system's limits with his long-awaited follow-up

WORDS BY RORY MILNE

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** ERE INFORMATIQUE
- **DEVELOPER:** RÉMI HERBULOT AND MICHEL RHO
- **RELEASED:** 1988
- **PLATFORM:** AMSTRAD CPC, ATARI ST
- **GENRE:** ADVENTURE

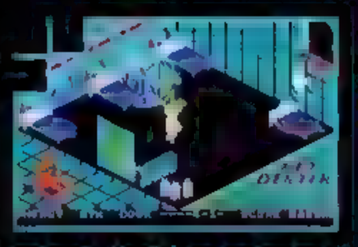
The expectation in the mid-Eighties heyday of home computer gaming was that a chart-topping title would receive a sequel in as short order as was practicably possible. At least, that was the case in the UK. In France, a shortage of professional coders meant that converting games to other systems was given priority over developing follow-ups, and this even applied to the massive Amstrad hit *Get Dexter*, as its developer Rémi Herbulot points out. "The pressure from my publisher was actually on doing as many conversions as possible," Rémi explains. "It was a small company, and it didn't have other programmers on hand to do them. So my publisher didn't let me go on holiday that much in those years, there was always something to do! At the time, I had two bestselling games, *Macadam Bumper* – a constructible pinball game – and *Get Dexter*, and there were many new computers coming out and going strong. I remember doing MSX, PC and Atari ST conversions."

Once these conversion commitments had been satisfied, however, Rémi shifted his focus to an entirely original project. "The idea of doing a follow-up to *Get Dexter* came soon enough," Rémi notes. "I was free to create what I wanted; Ere Informatique let its authors create without any interference. Of course, I told them of my project and we probably had discussions about what to do and what not to do, but I was their bestselling author, so there was no disagreement. My preference was to have more adventure while keeping the same level of exploration. I wanted to do something different, but I didn't only want to change the graphics and animation, my idea was to go further within the isometric type of game."

One area in particular where Rémi's sequel moved isometric gaming forwards was with its introduction of seamlessly linked locations, which the developer designed to allow players to see a short way into adjacent areas. "I was aiming to go further with the isometric view, to push the limits," Rémi enthuses. "I wanted to have no boundaries by expanding the game board. For a programmer, the challenge was to try new things, to do things that had not been done before. I remember that the landscape at the very top of the screen was a source of many difficulties, as I wanted to have the possibility to jump into thin air or to throw an object into the emptiness. Although that was a little bit silly, as most players wouldn't even try those things or even think of doing them!"

But other aspects of Rémi's overlapping locations would have a greater impact, more specifically the freedom they gave to their hostile inhabitants. "The main difference was that they could continue to chase you after changing locations," Rémi recollects. "Maybe it would have been better to have more intelligent opponents, but the technical limitations of 8-bit computers didn't allow much calculation and storage."

In order to limit the hazard posed by his sequel's roaming antagonists, Rémi scattered food supplies and defences, such as mousetraps, around its stages for his follow-up's hero Dexter to dispatch or distract his animal opponents with. "Maybe this was a little bit like in everyday life, but to be honest that was not the intention. It was mainly to build up the gameplay. Being chased by the animals could get annoying, so you had to get something to get rid of them. That was the same in *Get Dexter*, but in *Get Dexter 2* there were enough of these objects to get rid of all the opponents."



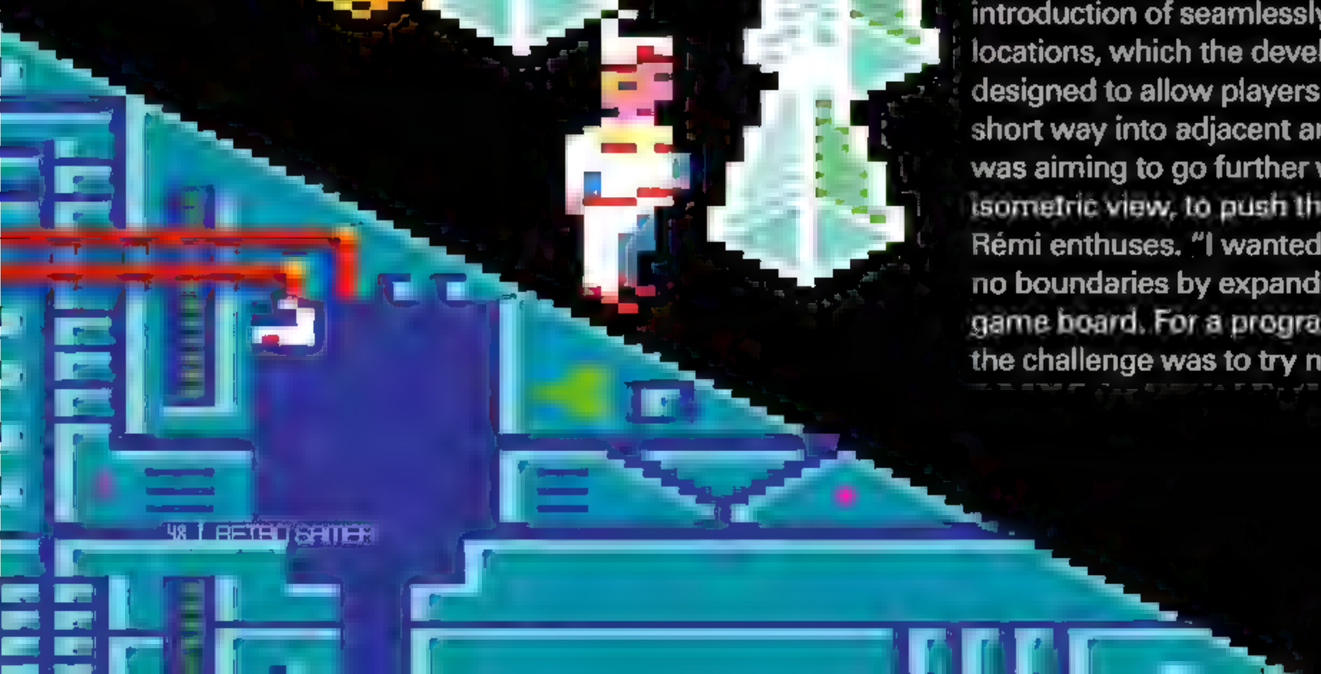
DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

GET DEXTER (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: AMSTRAD CPC, VARIOUS
YEAR: 1986

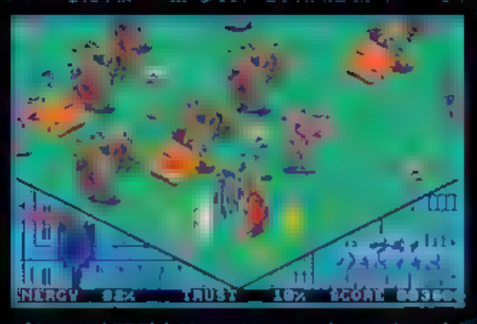
GET DEXTER 2
SYSTEM: AMSTRAD CPC, VARIOUS
YEAR: 1988

PURPLE SATURN DAY
SYSTEM: ATARI ST, VARIOUS
YEAR: 1989

» *Get Dexter 2* was the last game that Rémi Herbulot designed for the Amstrad CPC range.

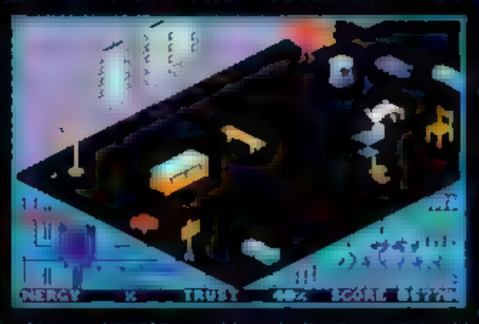


» [Amstrad CPC] One of *Get Dexter 2*'s tasks requires you to shake an orange tree without getting concussed.



» [Amstrad CPC] Arbitrary items, such as yellowed grass, can prove essential to solving puzzles.

» [Amstrad CPC] Get *Dexter 2*'s patients can be cured using a device that transforms organic matter.



» [Amstrad CPC] Some objects in *Get Dexter 2* should be approached with care – like its swivel chairs.

"I wanted to do something different, but I didn't only want to change the graphics, my idea was to go further within the isometric type of game"

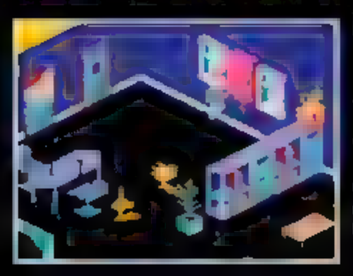
RÉMI HERBULOT

Another mechanic first used in *Get Dexter* would be improved upon in its successor, in the form of Dexter's strange alien travelling companion, Scooter. "I was sorry that I wasn't able to make Scooter more helpful in *Get Dexter*," Rémi admits. "Scooter being funny was one thing, but to have him being useful would be better. And as Scooter acted like a dog, why not have him fetch objects? I thought this functionality would provide players with another way of playing, as one player might use Scooter a lot to fetch objects, while another one might not use him at all, and having several ways of doing things was always a good thing."

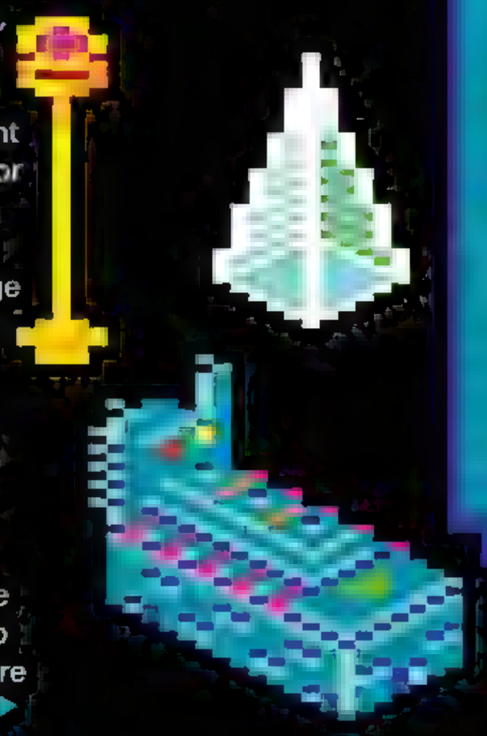
Rather than limiting his follow-up to just one odd-looking alien, however, Rémi instead opted to incorporate female members of Scooter's race, although these were limited to distracting Dexter's wingman rather than being playable characters. "One of the tricks at the time was to reuse parts of code dedicated to one character to create another one, in order to stay within the memory limitations," Rémi reveals. "But using the Xunkettes in the adventure more would have required more memory."

But despite these memory restraints, Rémi managed to add a second set of non-player characters to his emerging game whose natural instinct was to give Dexter much-needed items in return for things he had found lying around. "The idea came from the French comic *Valerian*," Rémi remembers, "which had a trio of very funny guys called Shingouz. They were always in the right place at the right moment to sell something to you or to exchange something with you, and I loved those guys. So when I added the functionality to exchange objects with the Swappis, my first thought was that they had to be Shingouz-like."

As well as populating the world he was building for *Get Dexter 2*, Rémi was also giving thought to his sequel's core challenge, the first half of which he split into three puzzle-based tasks. "What I tried to do was to have three tasks that were as different as possible," Rémi ▶



» [Amstrad CPC] Dexter's sidekick Scooter is loyal, except when he's distracted by an attractive Xunkette.

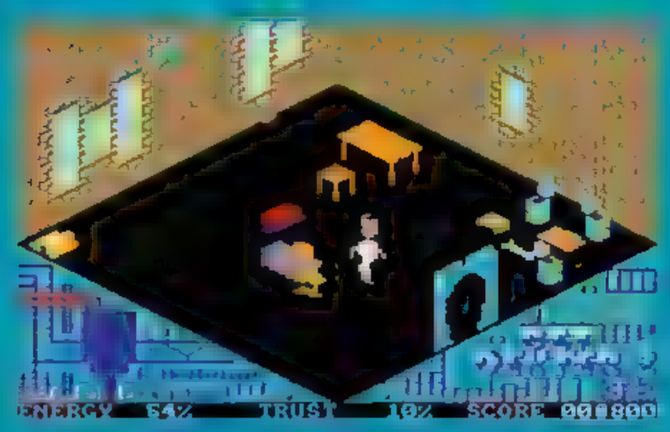


CONVERSION CAPERS

HOW THE DIFFERENT VERSIONS COMPARE

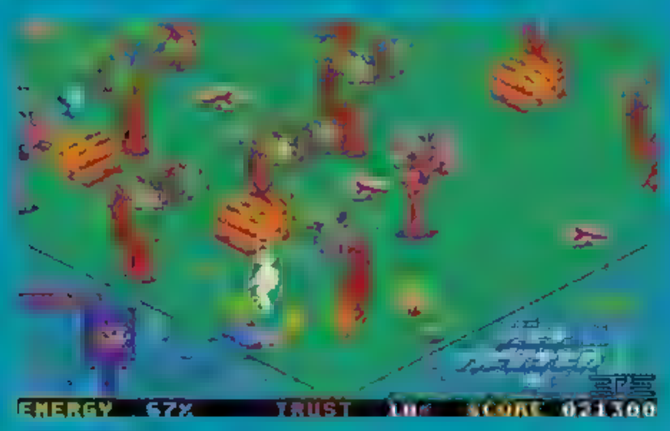
AMSTRAD CPC 6128

Designed to run on any CPC model with a disk drive, the CPC 6128 version of *Get Dexter 2* has 72 locations to the cassette version's 52 and boasts a wider variety of opponents. The disk version also has more detailed scenery sprites and beautifully rendered multicoloured backdrops instead of black backgrounds.



AMSTRAD CPC 464

Get Dexter 2 on the CPC 464 is unusual in that it's a stripped-back disk title fitted onto a cassette, but it's still the same lovingly crafted adventure. The puzzle-based tasks in its first part are solved in exactly the same way as the disk version, and its second section is identical to the original's.



ATARI ST

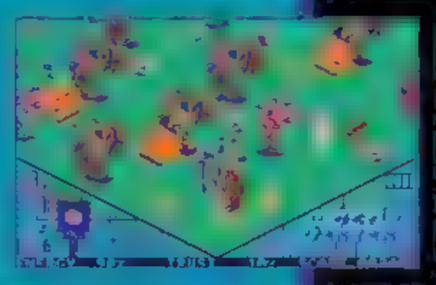
Unsurprisingly, the ST version looks and sounds better than the Amstrad disk original, with its catchy title tune being particularly noteworthy. The higher resolution 16-bit iteration does give Dexter more space to run around in, but its aggressive opponents more than compensate for this advantage.

MASTERING GET DEXTER 2

HOW TO TACKLE THE ISOMETRIC CLASSIC

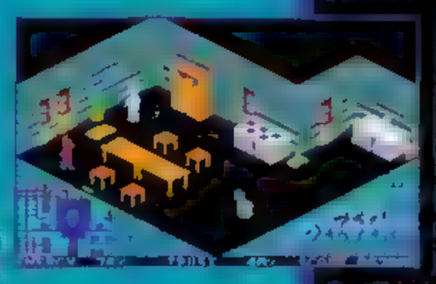
INTREPID EXPLORER

There aren't any filler stages in *Get Dexter 2* – every location contains potentially useful items, so thorough exploration is essential. A lot of the game's flick-screen isometric levels are quite distinct, particularly the interior ones, but its scenic outdoor stages are similar enough to justify making a map.



A SURE SIGN

Get Dexter 2 can initially seem daunting, as you have to work out for yourself what the three tasks in its opening section are. Thankfully, numerous signs – fixed either to walls or posts – are scattered around the game's stages, and these give clues to each challenge. That said, some of them are quite cryptic.



THE BEST DEFENCE

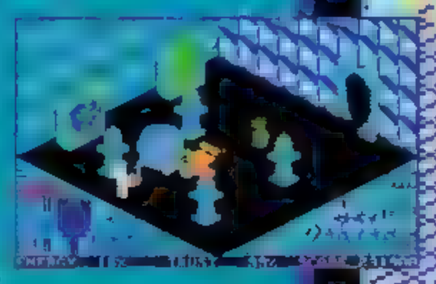
There aren't any handheld weapons in *Get Dexter 2*, but there are a few ways that you can deter the game's persistent opponents. You can either set giant mousetraps or light sticks of dynamite, which dispatch the sequel's animal and robot foes on contact, or you can temporarily distract them with power modules.

TAKE CHARGE

You begin *Get Dexter 2* with a 99 per cent charged Dexter, but the heroic droid loses power each time he takes a bad fall or comes into contact with an electricity-draining enemy. If he runs out of charge completely then it's game over, so it's important to regularly recharge in one of the buildings with a power point.

DROID'S BEST FRIEND

In some situations, Dexter's sidekick Scooter can be annoying, but the weird-looking alien has his uses. Besides enabling Dexter to jump on his head in order to reach high-up areas, Scooter will also bravely retrieve items from hazardous locations when Dexter points at them and signals his loyal friend to fetch.



» [Amstrad CPC] As their name suggests, *Get Dexter 2*'s Swappis are always offering to trade things with Dexter.

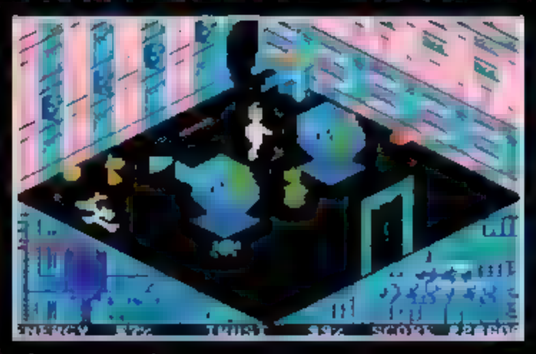
"My main goal was to provide the player with a vast and varied environment, a rich virtual world with many situations and events"

RÉMI HERBULOT

reflects. "My main goal was to provide the player with a vast and varied environment, a rich virtual world with many situations and events. Some players would find one puzzle more difficult than the others, but you have to remember that the most rewarding thing at the time was to work out what to do."

One of the tasks in Rémi's follow-up would involve finding statues and placing them on plinths in order to free the imprisoned leader of the game's trading-obsessed Swappis, and this task owed a lot to two movies. "There was a French film that I always loved called *L'Homme De Rio – That Man From Rio* – by Philippe De Broca," Rémi recollects. "It was a great adventure movie with a lot of action and a great amount of humour. Another movie that influenced me was *Raiders Of The Lost Ark*, and Spielberg had said that the Philippe De Broca movie had provided him with some plot elements. For example, the idea of sunlight reflecting on a medallion to show the exact place to dig treasure out from was in *That Man From Rio*, except it was with three little statues, so now you know where the statues in *Get Dexter 2* came from!"

But perhaps thinking that all work and no play would make Dexter a dull boy, Rémi complemented the tasks in his follow-up with humorous hazards such as swivel chairs that span his hero around before throwing him onto his rear end. "There were several things like that which were just included for the fun of it!", Rémi grins. "They were definitely not essential to finish the game, but they were a big part of the 'magic'. At the time, interacting with objects was the big thing. It was up to the player to discover these little things, and that was part of the pleasure of experimenting."



» [Amstrad CPC] Timing and fast responses are required in order to avoid *Get Dexter 2*'s wall-mounted lasers.

As a reward intended for those whose experiments resulted in the completion of *Get Dexter 2*'s puzzle-driven tasks, Rémi next devised a finale based on tomb raiding. "This part was like entering an old Egyptian or Inca tomb," Rémi considers. "I liked the opening sequence in *Raiders Of*

» [Amstrad CPC] Getting the 'Big Book' from the Grand Swappi requires a lot of collecting and backtracking.

The Lost Ark where Harrison Ford went inside a mountain to get a gold idol from a tomb protected by traps. I'm pretty sure that the idea of putting my Antines tomb inside a mountain came from that sequence, and then the final puzzle of the game with the musical crystals probably came from Spielberg's *Close Encounters Of The Third Kind* – that film fascinated me."

But despite the cinematic influences on the fourth act of Rémi's *Get Dexter* sequel, it was more compact and compartmentalised than the open world that preceded it. "The Antines part was smaller," Rémi acknowledges, "but the player could spend as much time getting to the end of it as the earlier part. It's true that the gameplay was different. It was a little bit like the original *Get Dexter* but without exploration, as there was only one path to follow and you had to solve puzzles to advance."

As well as puzzles, Rémi incorporated dynamite and wall-mounted laser guns into his sequel's final challenge, although this wasn't done to make the game more violent than its predecessor. "I don't think that either *Get Dexter* or *Get Dexter 2* were violent types of games – I'm not a violent type of guy," Rémi clarifies. "It's true that some of the opponents that you destroyed in *Get Dexter 2* were animals, but some were supposed to be robots, and you couldn't kill the Stiffians."

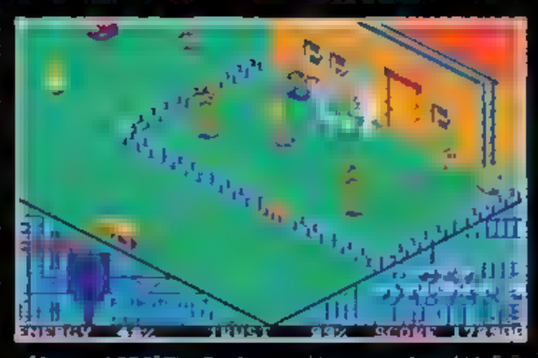
Once completed, Rémi's isometric follow-up was released with its cartoon violence intact, as *L'Ange De Cristal* in France and as *Get Dexter 2* in the UK, which proved to be a bittersweet experience for the acclaimed developer. "If I remember rightly, it was well-received but not with the same enthusiasm as *Get Dexter*," Rémi concedes. "*Get Dexter* amazed everybody when it came out because its graphics were just so different than the ones on the Spectrum. But when *Get Dexter 2* was released, the Amstrad had been in homes for more than two years and there were a lot of high quality games on it, so it was definitely more difficult to amaze people since the competition was much tougher."

Decades later, when asked for his current thoughts on *Get Dexter 2*, Rémi is in two minds. He indicates that he would make sweeping alterations, but his desire to completely rework his classic sequel is tempered by his warm feelings for the game. "It's a difficult question, because I'd change everything!" Rémi laughs. "That's why I was never keen to play my games after they came out, because you saw all the faults and you couldn't change a thing. But when I think of all my games, *Get Dexter 2* is definitely among my favourite ones because I made it from scratch and alone, except for the graphics and music, so it's like my child. It was also acclaimed in England as well as in France, and this was a big reward, as England was *the* place for 8-bit games at the time." ★

» [Amstrad CPC] The pyramids in *Get Dexter 2*'s final stage challenge you to a musical memory test.

» [Amstrad CPC] It's difficult to tempt a Quak out of his garden without getting thumped by the gate.

» [Amstrad CPC] The oddly named Protico has component parts that need to be relocated and then reconstructed.



» [Amstrad CPC] The Protico provides a cure for rabid Quaks if it's set up in the correct location.

» [Amstrad CPC] *Get Dexter 2*'s Quaks like bones, and one of the game's puzzles involves finding one.

CLASSIC MOMENTS

Worms: The Director's Cut

» **PLATFORM:** AMIGA 1200 » **RELEASED:** 1997 » **DEVELOPER:** TEAM17

You're not really a typical *Worms* player – guns and bombs don't really do it for you. It's not that you're some sort of wet, wimpy pacifist, far from it. You just feel that projectile weapons are so... *impersonal*. When you hurt someone, you really want to make a connection with them, and that's why your weapon of choice is the baseball bat. It's not a subtle or complex weapon, you just get up nice and close and then swing for the fences.

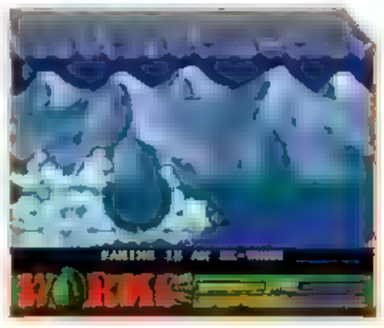
But this time, there's a bonus up for grabs – if you can aim your victim just right, they'll smash into another worm on the top of the hill and both will go tumbling into the sea. So you take the time to line up the shot, your opponents getting a little testy, and then *whack*. You judged it perfectly, hitting the home run and sending two enemy combatants into sea, which is almost as salty as your friends are. Now, where's the organ fanfare you're legally entitled to? ★

BIO

Team17 made its name on the Amiga, and when the time came to finally move on from the format, the developer made sure to give the fans something special as a parting gift. *Worms*' potent blend of comedy and artillery strategy had catapulted Team17 to international success, so Amiga owners got an enhanced version of that – the game featured better graphics, new cavern stages and crazier weapons including the popular Holy Hand Grenade and the bizarre Concrete Donkey. It's said that the game sold just 5,000 copies, which goes to show why the company was moving on from the Amiga.

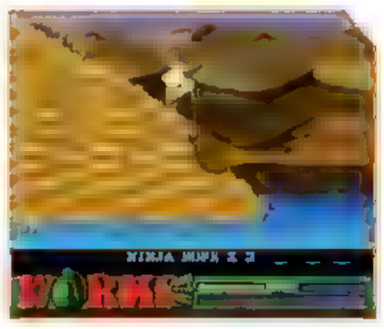
MORE CLASSIC WORMS: THE DIRECTOR'S CUT MOMENTS

Potassium Party



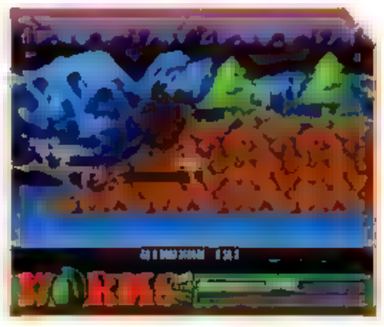
The **Retro Gamer** team loves to share a bunch of bananas – many a morning we'll come in to find Darran has left one on the desk for us. But bananas are even more fun to share in *Worms*. Lob one at a group of antagonistic annelids and watch as the bunch explodes like anything in a Michael Bay film.

Ninja Magic



One of the best things you can do to boost your chances of winning a game of *Worms* is to master the Ninja Rope. "There's no way out of this," your less-skilled opponent thinks. For them, that would be correct. But watch their jaw drop as you swing into baseball bat range – it's a truly beautiful sight.

Dark Side



Some might say that the most boring thing you can do in a game of *Worms* is tunnel underground, erect girders for protection and then spam airstrikes. They're totally right, of course – this is the behaviour of a scumbag. But seeing the angry looks on our opponents' faces makes it worth being scum.

Best Served Cold

Sometimes, a turn begins and you know your guy is doomed – that's just how life is. But once that grenade is thrown or the dynamite is laid, all it takes is a stray pixel-wide bit of land to block your killer's escape. Then it's their turn to watch in horror as the dying worm pulls out the plunger. "Bye bye" indeed!

ULTIMATE GUIDE:

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA®

LINK'S AWAKENING™

CREATING AN EPIC FANTASY ADVENTURE FOR A TINY MONOCHROME SCREEN WAS NEVER GOING TO BE AN EASY TASK. BUT, TO THE SURPRISE OF ABSOLUTELY NOBODY, NINTENDO HAD THE COURAGE, WISDOM, AND POWER TO PULL IT OFF FLAWLESSLY. RETRO GAMER REVISITS ONE OF THE MOST UNDERRATED MEMBERS OF THE ZELDA FAMILY

WORDS BY LUKE ALBIGES

ANTI-KIRBY

CHEF BEAR

If there's one thing that other games could stand to learn from *Link's Awakening*, it's that the stakes don't need to be absurdly high for a story to be captivating. Having spent three games (and many more after this one) dealing with potential end-of-the-world scenarios, *Link's Awakening* is little more than an escape room by comparison – our hero finds himself marooned on a strange island following a shipwreck and is tasked with simply getting away. And so, under the guidance of a talking owl and with a little help from some of the friendly islanders, Link sets about attempting to wake the mighty Wind Fish from its slumber, which is apparently the only way he might leave Koholint Island.

Mechanically, *Link's Awakening* feels almost like a greatest hits collection of the best elements of the trio of preceding games. Parallels with *A Link To The Past* are unsurprising given that this game originally started out as a proposed port of the SNES classic, but it clearly helped to influence and inform much of the Game Boy release's design. In terms of the NES games, *Zelda II*'s impact is most apparent from the inclusion of side-scrolling sections, while similarities to the original primarily spring from this being

[Game Boy] For some unknown reason, Marin really likes it when you use the Shovel. Some people are just easily pleased, we suppose.

MARIN

another case of big ideas on hardware that should by rights be too small for them. Literally, in this case – as well as a smaller, monochrome screen to work with, there would also be the button limitations of the Game Boy to consider after *A Link To The Past* had gone beyond what was possible on the two-button NES controller. A handful of talented artists would see to that first issue, but the second would not be so easily resolved.

Despite the Game Boy sharing the same limited control options as the NES, *A Link To The Past* evolved the core systems of the series to a point that made use of more buttons, so a creative solution was required. To that end, *Link's Awakening* became the first *Zelda* game where the sword is not mapped to its own button, with both the A and B buttons

BOWWOW

ARMOS KNIGHT

ZOL

COLOUR US IMPRESSED

LINK GETS A FRESH LICK OF PAINT ON GBC

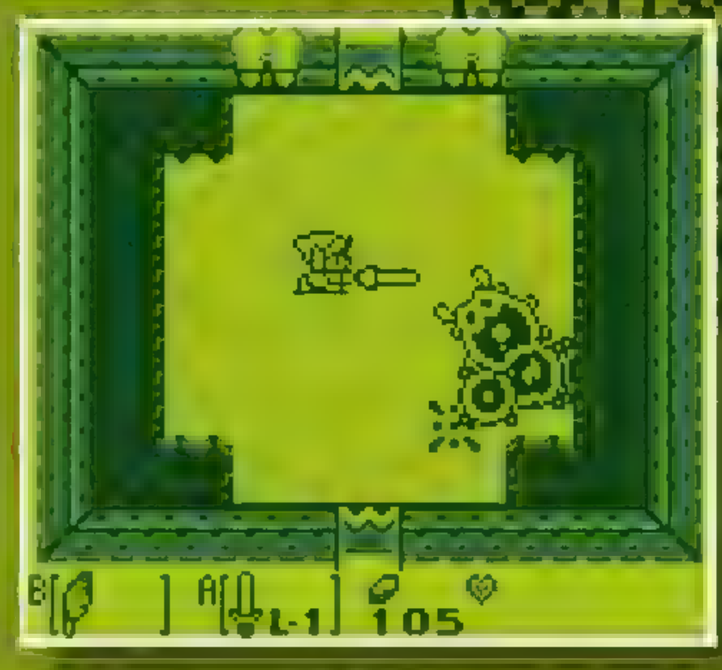
Arriving some five years after the original game's release, *Link's Awakening DX* for Game Boy Color breathed new life into the classic adventure with its vivid palette and suite of new features. Chief among these – aside from the colourful visual upgrade – is a brand-new dungeon for Link to explore. The aptly named Color Dungeon expands on what was possible in the monochrome original, with puzzles and mechanics that rely on the use of coloured objects and enemies. Completing this trial rewards Link with a choice of either the Red Clothes or Blue Clothes, new items that double his attack and defence respectively. In addition, the enhanced port also features support for the Game Boy Printer, with a number of photo opportunities added to the world for Link to find over the course of his adventure. The resulting snapshots can be printed out as cute little *Link's Awakening DX* stickers.

PIRANHA

OLL

able to be assigned to any item Link finds. While this can make for some fiddly item switching (particularly in later, more complex dungeons), the flexibility of the system also allows for the use of item combos the likes of which the series hadn't seen before... or since, really. Long gaps can be cleared by combining the Pegasus Boots with the Roc's Feather, for instance, or equipping Bombs and the Bow and pressing both buttons simultaneously allows Link to loose an explosive arrow. While the former is the only item combo required to beat the game, having those other options in there gives players a chance to be surprised by their own experimental solutions – a rarity in a series so grounded in linear formula, and really something you only otherwise see in the latest entry in the *Zelda* series, *Breath Of The Wild*.

The differences between *Link's Awakening* and most of its stablemates don't stop there, either. Trading sequences are a staple sidequest in the franchise, but this is the only *Zelda* game where the entire endeavour is mandatory. As such, it's

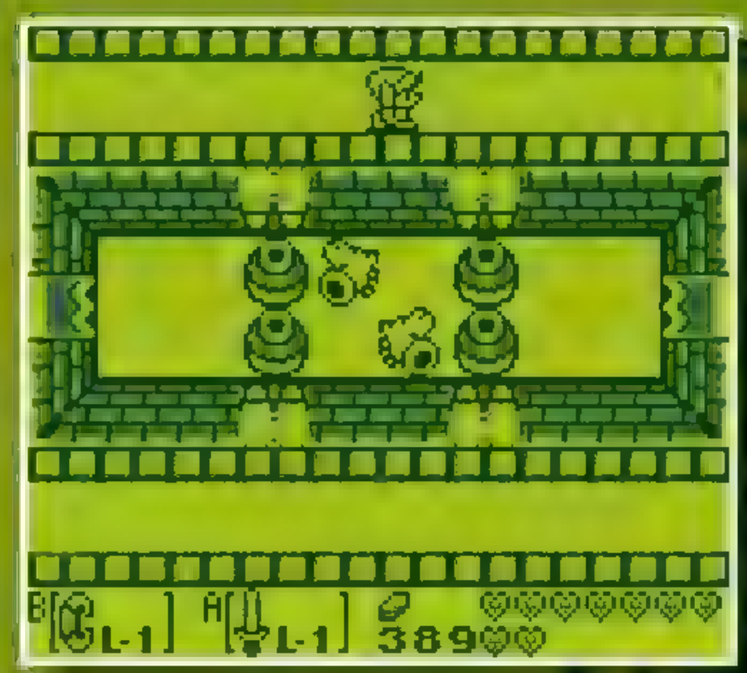


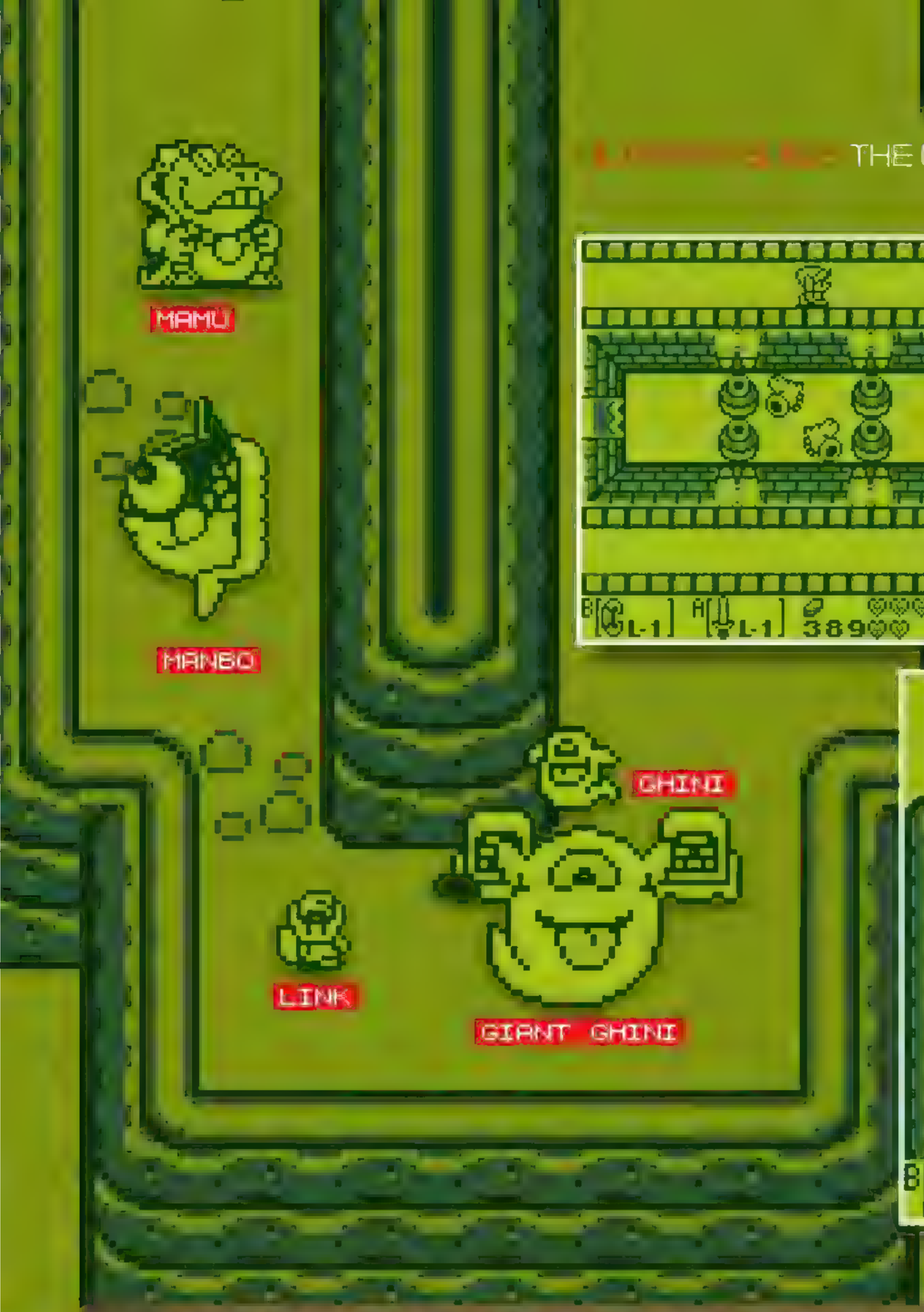
Game Boy). Just like in *A Link To The Past*, the Moldorm boss loves to pum you into pits and make you start the fight over. Mind the gaps as you work its tail

a little more streamlined and obvious than its peers and feels more like helping people out along your journey, rather than ditching your main objective and going out of your way to run errands for them. It's strange that would be the case in the game with the least pressing objective in the entire series, but it's a great way of allowing players to meet the weird and wonderful residents of Koholint without it feeling like busywork. But perhaps the most noticeable difference of all is the game's tone, which is much more playful, whimsical and lighthearted than any other game in the series, thanks in no small part to the lack of a Ganon-like big bad looming large and ready to bring an end to the world. There's just this wonderful dreamlike quality to Koholint, apparent in everything from its curious cast of characters and creatures to it having the feel of a slightly misremembered memory of a *Zelda* adventure, with elements of other Nintendo games seeping in (domesticated Chain Chomps are found in Mabe Village, Mario enemies such as Goombas and Piranha Plants inhabit dungeons, as does an evil version of Kirby later on, while the trading sequence

GENIE

GREAT FAIRY





(Game Boy) The overworld opens up quickly, especially with the first special item gained in a dungeon being the Roc's Feather, which allows Link to leap over gaps.

REAWAKENING LINK

A LEGEND REBORN ON SWITCH

[redacted] be a little twee for some people's tastes, there's no denying that it perfectly captures the feel of the

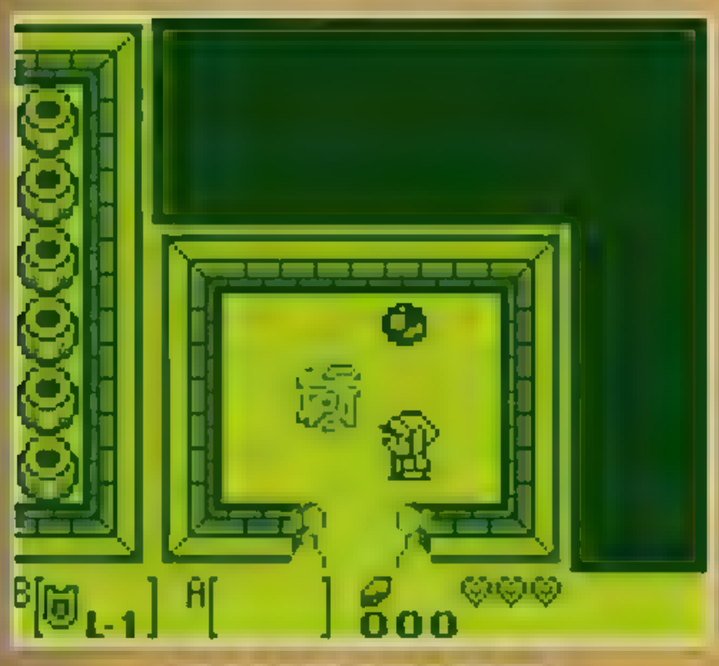
[redacted] beautiful environments to pop like never before, and it's going to be a joy [redacted] isn't stopping with just the visuals, either. While it seems like most of the core game will be [redacted]

[redacted] to delve into. The Chamber Dunge[redacted] proposition, as it allows players to piece together [redacted] creations, so be sure to head to where the Camera Shop [redacted]

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA
LINK'S AWAKENING

A LINK TO THE FAST

A FEW OF THE TRICKS SPEEDRUNNERS USE TO WAKE THE WIND FISH IN RECORD TIME

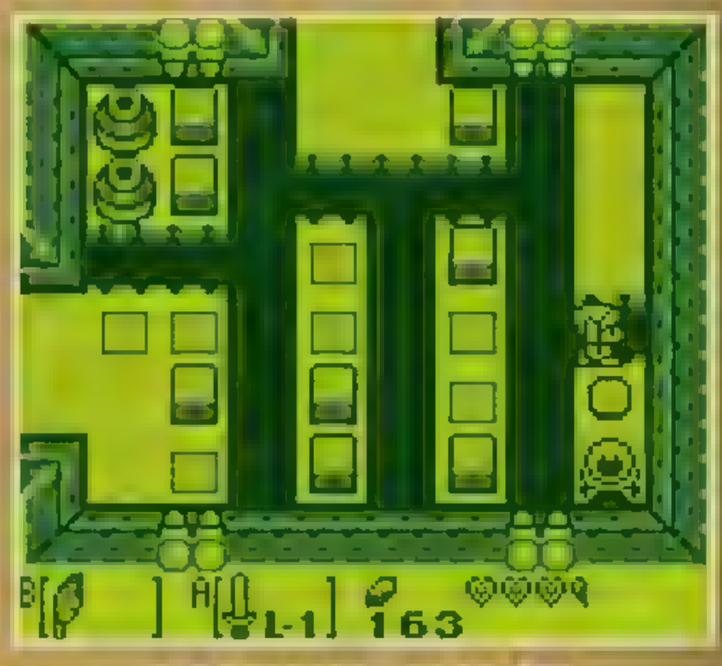


SAVE/QUIT

Here, entering and leaving buildings and caves is the usual way to set where you restart after quitting, and load quickly, since it's often faster to return to the instantly return to the entrance room as well.

TEXT SKIP

Start+Select+A+B as soon as any text box would dialogue in the game, from simple item descriptions to longer conversations. It only typically saves a few course of the run.



SUPER JUMP

for some of the most significant skips! By clipping into your sword while jumping, you can set up jumps that can clear otherwise impossible obstacles and even where this can save significant time.

INSTRUMENT SKIP

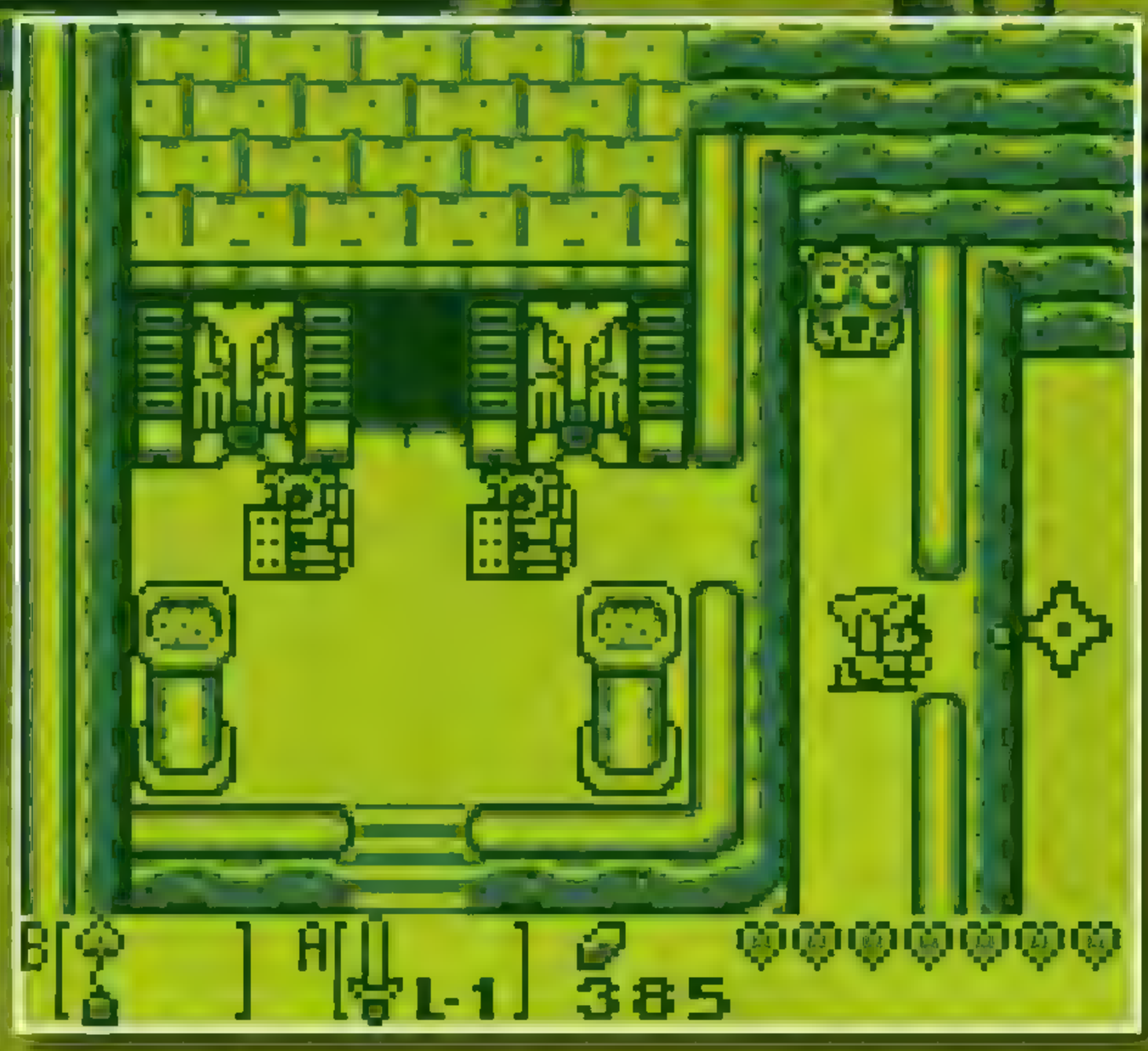
you pick up the instrument at the end of a dungeon. This involves setting up Link's position so he's only a pixel away from the instrument and using the map screen to buffer into the save menu as the item is picked up, although this is not what you might call 'consistent'.

BOMB TRIGGER

happens on the new screen. This can be used to skip the walrus blocking the exit to Animal Village, open the Turtle Rock dungeon, break the pillars in Eagle's Tower, and even skip the Wind Fish Egg sequence, although it can be quite fiddly and requires two bombs per skip.

MAGIC ROD DESPAWN

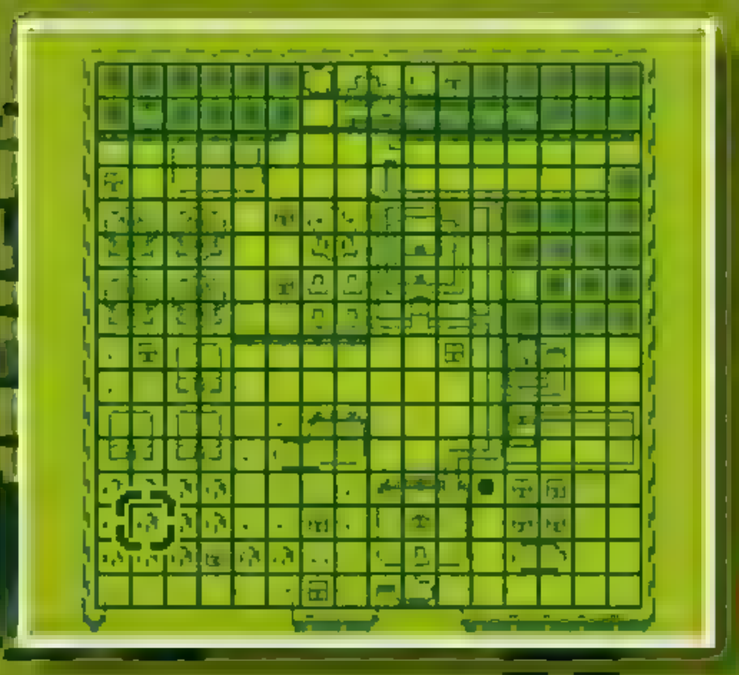
game's sprite limit. Going into the menu quickly after multiple Magic Rod projectiles are active can cause intense slowdown, and changing the screen straight after this will despawn any sprites on that screen, including bosses.



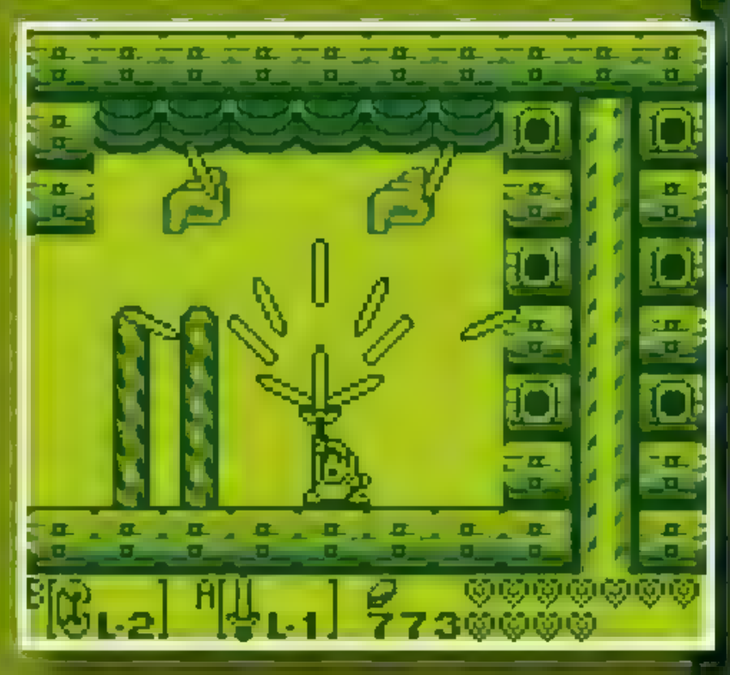
Game Boy] Link is invincible while the Hookshot is extended, making throwing it out an easy way to avoid damage from certain attacks and enemies

...includes cameos from Yoshi, Peach and even Prince Richard from *Link's Awakening*'s Japan-only Game Boy forerunner, *Kaeru No Tame Ni Kane Wa Naru*) and lashings of self-referential humour in a series that typically tends to play things pretty straight.

All of this combines to give *Link's Awakening* a very different flavour to most other *Zelda* games, and it's perhaps for this reason that it's not treated with the same reverence as notable series highlights such as *A Link To The Past* and *Ocarina Of Time*. For all its charm and whimsy, though, it's somewhat ironic that this clear outlier should be one of the most rigidly linear examples of traditional *Zelda* game structure, to the point where dungeons are literally numbered and cannot be tackled out of sequence. Conversely, the dungeons themselves feature virtually no such handholding after the first few, save for a handful of stone tablets that offer cryptic clues. Crucial items can be hidden in untelegraphed secret rooms, while some of the puzzles and chests require a level of lateral thinking far beyond the standard 'use the last item you picked up to overcome this' nature of so many other games in the genre.



We almost feel bad for *Link's Awakening*, and indeed for so many of the slightly quirkier *Zelda* games that came after it. They're inherently always going to exist in the shadow of the handful of truly genre-defining members of their own family, their own innovations and triumphs dwarfed by those of the two *Zelda* games that have a residency on just about every major all-time top ten list ever compiled. But it's important to remember just how much of an impact these less-discussed classics in the series help shape and evolve the all-time greats – by Eiji Aonuma's own admission in an *Iwata Asks* piece from 2010, *Ocarina Of Time* would have been a very different game were it not for innovations from *Link's Awakening* in the fields of broad narrative and character development. Interestingly, the same piece also cites *Twin Peaks* as an influence on *Link's Awakening*, which makes a heck of a lot of sense in retrospect. It's important to love and respect these series underdogs, then, since without them, the classics that dominate discussion of both series and genre simply would no exist. As if *Link's Awakening* weren't lovable enough already, that's just another reason it'll always be one of our favourite *Zelda* games.



PEAHAT

WALRUS

GRANDPA ULRIRA

SEA URCHIN

Hardware Heaven

FM Towns

» **MANUFACTURER:** Fujitsu » **YEAR:** 1989 » **COST:** ¥396,000 (launch, Model 2), ¥55,000+/£410+ (today, Model 2 boxed), ¥20,000+/£150+ (today, Model 2 unboxed)

One of the keys to launching a successful business is to identify a consumer demand that isn't being fulfilled, and respond to it with a suitable product. That's what Fujitsu aimed to do with the FM Towns, a computer that attempted to differentiate its focus from that of NEC's market-leading PC-98 series of computers. Using its FM R50 IBM-compatible PC as a base, Fujitsu marketed the FM Towns as a "hyper media personal computer", with graphics and audio technology that vastly outstripped what could be achieved by NEC's computer. The machine's distinctive design featured a vertically-mounted CD-ROM drive on the front of the tower, highlighting a key selling point.

While the system's strong technology ensured that it had fans, as well as some highly impressive games, the system never became as big of a success as Fujitsu had hoped. The computer was very expensive for home use, and it was competing in the same market sector as the very capable Sharp X68000, which had arrived to the market sooner. NEC maintained its iron grip amongst professional users until the mid-Nineties. As time went on, the FM Towns line became more focused on PC compatibility, before eventually being discontinued in 1997.

ESSENTIAL GAME

Tatsujin Oh

There are two kinds of people in this world – those who openly adore shoot-'em-ups, and those who are in a bottomless pit of denial. Therefore, it's obvious that you (yes, you) want to play *Tatsujin Oh*, or *Truxton II* in its western arcade guise. Unfortunately, it was only ever converted to the FM Towns, which means you'll need to either buy an expensive original PCB, or buy this conversion. To be honest, both options will probably cost about as much, but at least you'll be able to play extra games on the FM Towns once you've got it.

FM Towns fact

- The FM Towns was available in two configurations at launch – the Model 1 offered 1MB RAM and a single floppy disk drive, and was priced at ¥338,000.

PROCESSORS: 32-BIT INTEL 80386SX CPU (16 MHZ)

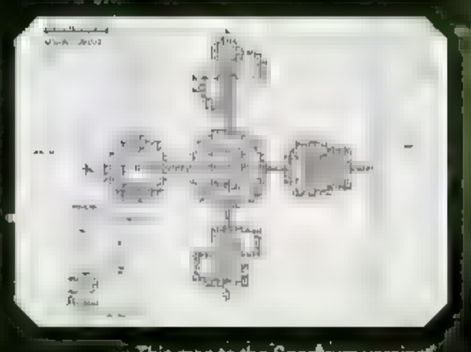
RAM

SYSTEM SUPPLIED BY **GARY PINKETT**

THE HISTORY OF ALIEN VIDEOGAMES

PRIORITY ONE: RETRO GAMER CREW TO TELL THE STORY OF ALIENS VIDEOGAMES, THE STORY OF A PERFECT ORGANISM, ITS STRUCTURAL PERFECTION MATCHED ONLY BY ITS HOSTILITY. A SURVIVOR, UNCLOUDED BY CONSCIENCE, REMORSE, OR DELUSIONS OF MORALITY. ALL OTHER PRIORITIES... ARE RESCINDED

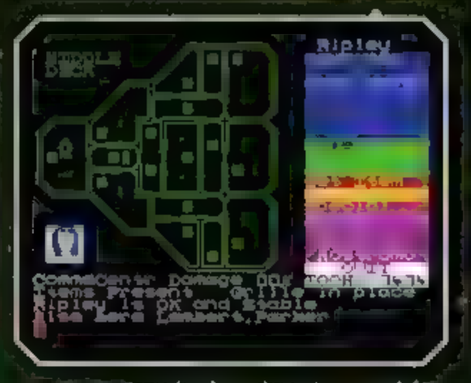
Words by Graeme Mason



This map to the Spectrum version of *Aliens* UK demonstrates the size of the task that awaits Ripley and co.

It begins with a simple distress signal, a light blinking somewhere on the bridge of the commercial tug, USCSS Nostromo. Owned by the Weyland-Yutani corporation, the Nostromo is en-route between a planet named Thedus and our very own Earth, lugging a mobile ore processing refinery behind it. As with all spacecraft, it's obligated to answer the beacon and investigate its source. Unless you've been in hypersleep for the last 40 years, you'll know that the signal is fake and the crew are expendable assets as the nefarious company attempts to procure the grisly creatures that reside on the planet of LV-426.

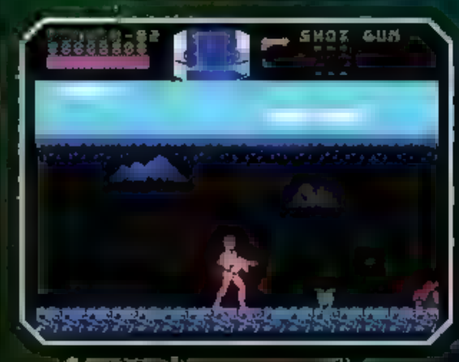
Despite *Alien* being little more than a haunted house movie, only set in space and featuring a slobbering Xenomorph rather than ghosts, it managed to spawn two direct games and instigate a long-running series. Firstly, in 1982, 20th Century Fox's own videogame arm did its best to reproduce the terror in a single-screen maze where the aim is to dodge aliens and stomp on eggs, represented by dots; yes, it's *Pac-Man* in space, albeit with a few modifications. The power pills are now 'pulsars', which enable Ellen Ripley to turn the tables and temporarily distract the hunting aliens. Destroy all of the eggs on each level and there's a bonus game in the form of another clone, this time *Frogger* (or *Freeway*, depending on your gaming heritage). Guide Ripley across the room, evading a suspiciously large horde of Xenomorphs, and a special bonus item is yours, before it's onto another identical maze full of eggs. A commendable, if bland, movie licence, *Alien* was released solely on the Atari 2600, and had little hope of realistically recreating the masterful slow-burning dread that inspired it. Nonetheless, thanks to its unremitting and monotonous tone, there's a sincere element of panic and fear as the player is stalked throughout the blue maze, valiantly crushing those icky eggs.



[ZX Spectrum] Things are getting a little tense and dark in Argus Press Software's *Alien*.

Two years later, and five years after the release of the film, British publisher Argus Press Software picked up the licence from 20th Century Fox, developing an entirely different game to the Atari 2600 effort. Having been a part of Imagine Software's 'megagames', Paul Clansey helped set up Concept Software, and *Alien* became one of its first games. "I don't know the constraints Paul was under," says John Heap, coder of the ZX Spectrum version, "but to do a film licence like *Alien* as my first published game was absolutely fantastic." In stark disparity to the Atari 2600 game, Paul and John's game is a strategy title, lacking instant thrills and accessibility, but gaining a forbidding sense of doom as the player, controlling all the members of the spaceship Nostromo, must somehow find a way to defeat the deadly creature that erupts from a random member of the crew. Hang on, how come John Hurt got off so lightly? "If it always came out of Kane, you'd keep away from him," smiles John, "or dispatch him to the far reaches of the ship." The spaceship Nostromo is presented over three decks in a schematic style, with a series of ducts laying behind each level. A menu allows the player to control each crew member, move them from room to room, pick up objects and monitor their mental state, with the method of defeating the alien ranging from the laser pistols stowed in the armoury, blowing it out of an airlock or escaping in the shuttle, complete with that elusive cat, Jones. The emotion concept, each character's frame of mind, is a neat addition, as is the parity of sound that accentuates the remote loneliness and peril of the player. "[The emotion concept] was a good idea which meant that [characters] might not always do as they were told," says John. "In a lot of my games after *Alien* I had an emotional attribute to my characters. It makes them unpredictable and allows man-management features to be added. I guess in a way I want both the NPCs and player's character to show ▶

[Atari ST] Despite capturing the feel of the movie, this Atari ST *Aliens* strategy game is a little on the dull side.



[MSX] A odd, naked-looking Ripley in the MSX game *Aliens: Alien 2*.

THE HISTORY OF: ALIEN VIDEOGAMES

» Jaz Austin worked on the Game Boy version of *Alien III* for Bits Studios.

» Joe Bonar was involved with the *Alien 3* games and *Alien Trilogy* for Probe.

» Jon Dean found himself working on an early *Alien* game for Activision.

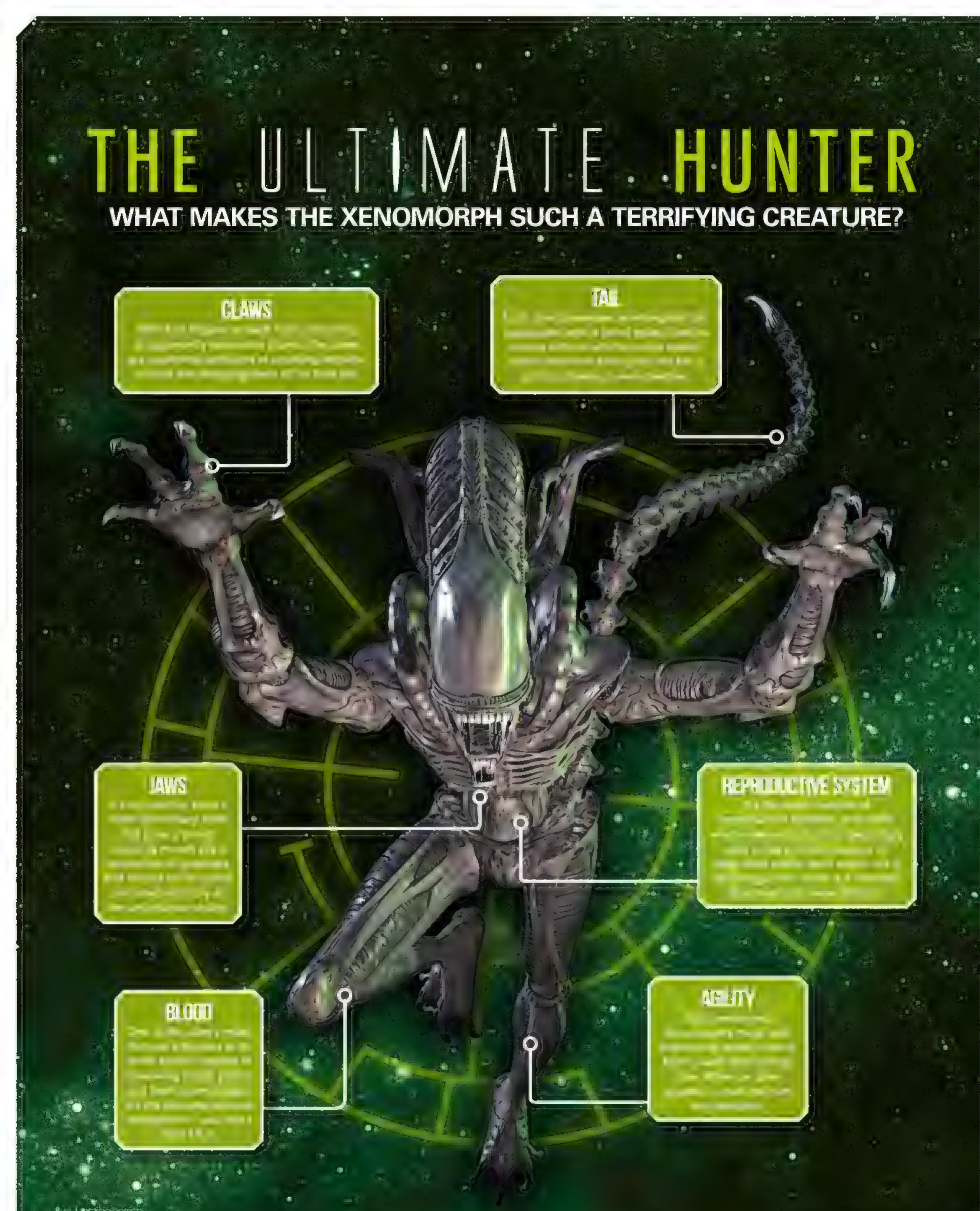
» Mark Eyles used a first-person viewpoint to terrify 8-bit gamers with *Aliens*.

THE ULTIMATE HUNTER

WHAT MAKES THE XENOMORPH SUCH A TERRIFYING CREATURE?

CLAWS

TAIL



JAWS

REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM

BLOOD

AGILITY

intelligence." The intensity of the game, the helplessness in front of a killing machine, was upped as best the Concept team could, bearing in mind the limited tech. "Having the door sound as either your crew or the alien moved around was a stroke of genius, and a lesson to us all: less is more." *Alien* was well-received, but for its sequel, the tone turned to something far more adaptable into an interactive format that mostly employs shooting elements. Mostly.

A*liens*, starring Sigourney Weaver, reprising the role of the Nostromo's sole human survivor, takes place 57 years after the events of the first movie. Considerably more action-packed, there are both guns and aliens galore as the fight is taken to the planet of LV-426. In the face of stiff competition, Activision acquired the licence, and soon two separate games were under development. Software Studios developer Jon Dean takes up the story of why. "It was down to politics. Activision US didn't like anything about 'our' game, so decided to make their own. One of the arguments was that they could make use of disk drives for faster loading and more seamless gameplay, whereas European formats relied on single loading from cassette." The result was two diverse games, one with multiple levels offering variety streaming from disk, with the UK version more repetitive in terms of both graphics and gameplay, but none the worse for it. *Aliens* UK is presented in a first-person tile format as the player takes control of six members of the USS Sulaco, including Ripley, android Bishop, company slime Carter Burke and a trio of marines. Over the pond, *Aliens* US closely follows the movie as several minigames mimic scenes such as the dropship descent, med lab defence and the final confrontation with the Queen. "No doubt the Software Studios version is superior!" claims Jon Dean, unsurprisingly. "It did a better job evoking the atmosphere – to my mind that is key to movie tie-ins, you need to figure out how you allow someone to play what they feel. Literal translations don't serve the purpose as well, despite being faithful." *Aliens* UK was designed by Mark Eyles, formerly of Quicksilva, and Mark notes that his objective was to use the premise and make a game from there. With *Aliens* adopted from just its script, it was a sensible approach. "The *Aliens* UK game was based on the idea that the player would create their own story from the locations and characters in the film, and this is my preferred approach. *Aliens* is such a well-known franchise now that it's hard to envisage what it was like getting the script for the movie. As far as how it would look and feel, all I had to go on was the original *Alien* movie." Taking the core facets, the characters, locations, weaponry and adversaries, Mark and the team created an atmospheric game where progress throughout the maze-like colony was frantic and tense. "The developers did a brilliant job of implementing the design," he says. "The room graphics were built of many modules, or panels, so that a room could be created by pasting them together alongside each other. I tried to pick out the most important characters in the movie to make an interesting team, and I preferred our version to the US [version]. But they both sold well, so I'm sure there were many players that enjoyed that alternative approach."

> "I TRIED TO PICK OUT THE MOST IMPORTANT CHARACTERS IN THE MOVIE TO MAKE AN INTERESTING TEAM, AND I PREFERRED OUR VERSION TO THE US [VERSION]"
>
> JON DEAN

Before we move to the third movie in the franchise, there are three more *Aliens* games to make note of, and all are odd in the way they represent the film. *Aliens*: *Alien 2*, released exclusively for the MSX in 1987 sees an apparently naked-looking Ripley venture into a *Metroid*-styled platform game, complete with giant boss aliens and weapons hidden inside Facehugger eggs. The same year, the Atari ST was treated to a public domain turn-based strategy game that, while including impressive digital scans and sound samples from the movie, lacked much in the way of excitement. Finally, a full four years after the film appeared in cinemas, Konami released *Aliens* (1990) into arcades, shoehorning a familiar run-and-gun gameplay model to the Xenomorphic theme. Despite a few aberrations, this is a fun blast, and there's even some welcome variety to the by-now tired format – who doesn't want to sit astride a speeding APC blasting oncoming aliens?

The oft-delayed and tortuous *Alien 3* arrived in cinemas in 1992, mercilessly killing two of the surviving characters from the previous film before it even began. Sigourney Weaver, allegedly at odds with the large

[SNES] Now where's that flamethrower when you need it...

GAME OVER, MAN!

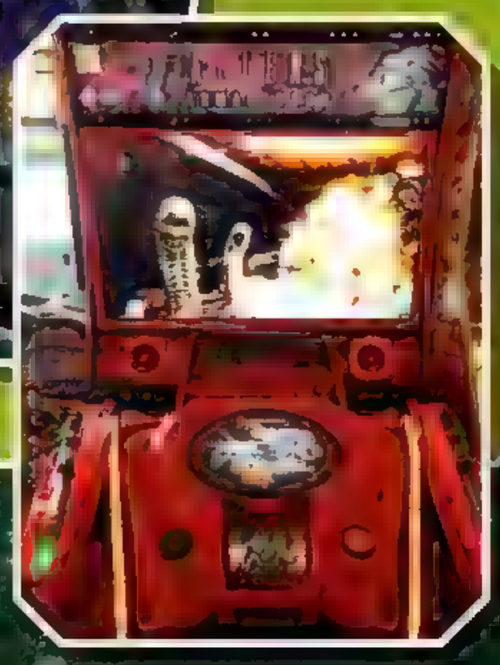
SHIT THAT DIDN'T GET SECURED

Given the rich history of *Alien* comics, an interactive CD-i comic book must have seemed a good idea. For whatever reason, *Aliens Interactive* failed to appear, at least on the Philips console, although it's possible that it inspired the 1995 PC game, *Aliens: A Comic Book Adventure*. How far the Lynx version of *Alien Vs Predator* got is also debatable, although it's likely it was jettisoned in favour of a full-on focus on its fellow Atari hardware, the Jaguar. In 2002, Fox and Electronic Arts cancelled their mutual *Aliens: Colonial Marines* PlayStation 2 game, despite the presence of the game at E3, with some rumours citing the game's poor impression at the conference. Rebellion itself created a demo for the same console in 2004 for Vivendi called *Aliens: Hadley's Hope*, which also failed to materialise, as did *Aliens: Crucible* from Obsidian Entertainment, apparently scuppered by a lack of faith in the mix of aliens and RPGs, plus the re-emergence of the *Aliens Vs Predator* spin-off franchise.

YOU STARTED THIS SHOW ME EVERYTHING

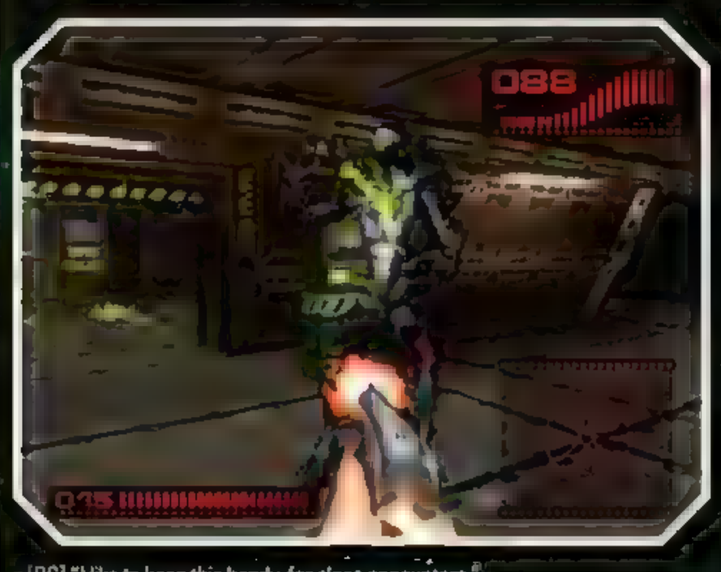
THE BEST OF THE REST OF ALIEN VIDEOGAMES

Predating Rebellion's first *Alien Vs Predator* game by a year is Activision's scrolling fighting game of the same name, released exclusively on the SNES, and there's also an unrelated arcade game from Capcom, notable for including a character modelled on Arnold Schwarzenegger's Dutch Schaefer from *Predator*. 1995 saw the *Aliens: Comic Book Adventure* released on PC while *Aliens Online* was a short-lived GameStorm title that pitched the Colonial Marines against an alien hive. 2002's *Primal Hunt* extended the *AVP 2* storyline, while 2003's PlayStation 2 and Xbox game *Aliens Vs Predator: Extinction* took the franchise into the world of real-time strategy. The long-delayed release of that film inspired a mobile game in 2004, before Global VR's *Aliens: Extermination* took the fight back to arcades in 2006, a conflict upheld by manufacturer Raw Thrills and *Aliens: Armageddon* nine years later, cheekily reskinned into *Alien: Covenant* upon that film's release. Rounding off the *AVP* games, there's an obscure 2007 Japanese Pachinko machine and *AVP: Evolution*, a third-person mobile game that also got release on the ill-fated Ouya. Sadly, since the success of *Alien: Isolation*, there's been little for fans of the series to get their piston-fired jaws into. 2016's *Aliens Vs Pinball* pinball videogame was released on multiple platforms, failing on all to represent the tense atmosphere of the movies, while most recently, *Alien: Blackout* continues the story of *Isolation*'s Amanda Ripley, disappointingly consigned to the mobile platform. And the less said about Gearbox's 2013 game *Aliens: Colonial Marines*, the better.

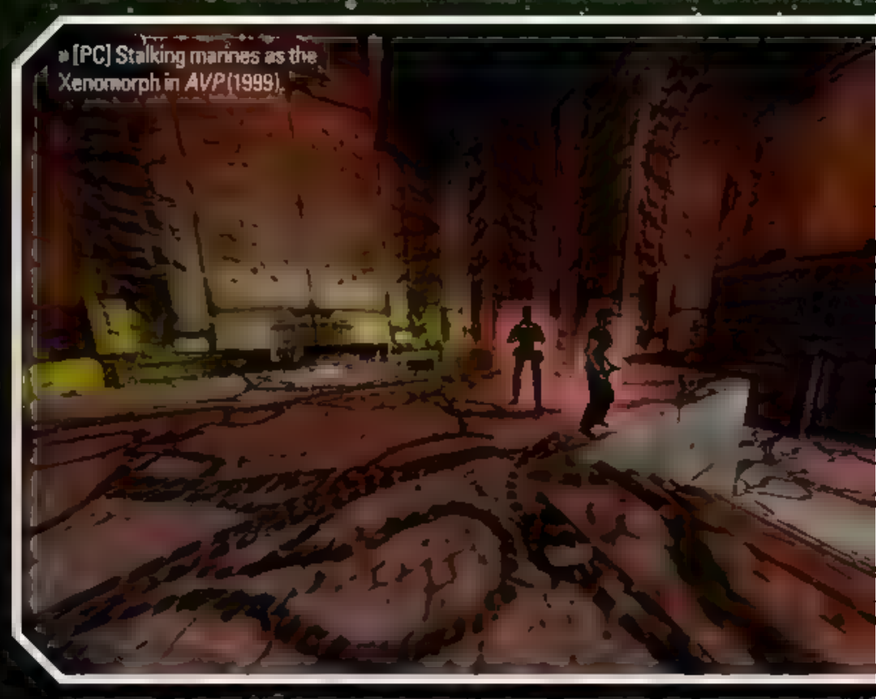


amount of gunplay from *Aliens*, preferred that the weaponry was almost totally absent, and the result is a leaner, grimmer movie that imitates the first film in its singular and contained threat of a lone alien. Having burned through a number of writers and directors, the troubled production concluded with director David Fincher, and was tipped to become a hot summer blockbuster. That didn't transpire as audiences were distracted by more upbeat fare such as *Lethal Weapon 3*, but it didn't stop Acclaim Entertainment acquiring the licence to create a game adaptation. Producer and project manager for Acclaim's developer, Probe, was Joe Bonar, and handled all versions save the SNES and Game Boy. "It was the golden age of platform games," remembers Joe, "and we had this amazing tile-based engine called CRISP that made the creation of really solid platform games very straightforward. We used to joke that during negotiations about licences, people would say, 'Can you provide a game out of our IP?' And we would reply, 'Yes. How many platforms would you like?'"

Alien 3 led on the Sega Mega Drive, with spec-driven changes to each subsequent platform. "I read the script under an NDA and helped pitch for the game itself," recalls Joe. "I also visited Pinewood Studios, the handler told us to squeeze inside a gap, and led us right into the tunnels of Fiorina 161. We went around all the corridors, taking photos and seeing blood all over the place. Very surreal." Also in the UK, the one version of



» [PC] "I like to keep this handy, for close encounters."

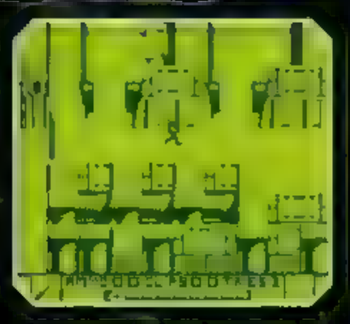


Alien 3 that differs from the platform template was being designed and coded by Jas Austin of Bits Studios. Like the Probe team, Jas only had the film's script to work from, and with Bits contracted to make the Game Boy port thanks to its experience on the platform, he was able to try something a little different, as Jas explains, "I guess a run-and-gun platform game would have been the obvious choice, but my previous game, *Terminator 2*, had been like that, so I was keen to try something different. Secondly, I had the feeling the other versions of *Alien 3* would be like that, too. And finally, after reading the script, it was clear the film was not action-focused like *Aliens*, so we felt a slower-paced adventure game would suit it better." The result is an excellent and atmospheric handheld game that evinces the movie well, despite its coder's own reservations. "I would have liked to have made the final Queen boss fight more exciting, or perhaps included more puzzles," notes Jas. "And it was all a bit too hit and miss and random. But looking back I think we did pretty well capturing the feel of the film."

Back on the other platforms, the film's lack of weaponry created a brief discussion at Probe/Acclaim. "We always liked to keep things simple," says Joe, "and we decided that having no weapons would be dull, and difficult, so we just said, 'Let's add weapons!' and away we went. Looking back, I'd have loved to have made something different, or even a change of pace in the main game, but I like all the versions and am very proud of them. We had a lot of

HANDHELD HORRORS

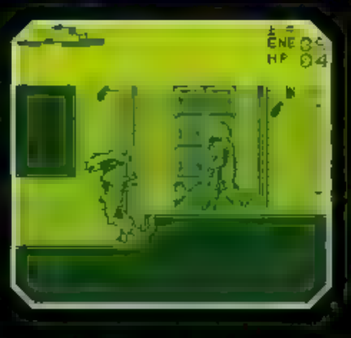
ALIEN 3
GAME BOY



Alien 3 spawned a range of variable games, including this disparate effort from Bits Studios. Eschewing the standard Game Boy platformer fare, *Alien 3* is a maze game by programmer Jas Austin, and is actually a decent stab at creating a survival horror game on the Nintendo handheld.

THE ALIEN GAMES THAT STAYED EXCLUSIVELY MOBILE

ALIEN VS PREDATOR: THE LAST OF HIS CLAN
GAME BOY



Not quite as impressive is this side-scrolling platform game where the player guides a huge predator across a world infested with aliens and, finally, the Queen itself. Not particularly deep or original, yet a decent effort that has some nice touches, such as blobs of deadly acid dripping from the ceiling.

» [Jaguar] Someone is gonna have to clear up this mess in *Alien Vs Predator*

"I THINK SOMETHING LIKE 84 PER CENT OF PEOPLE WHO BOUGHT A JAGUAR BOUGHT ALIEN VS PREDATOR"

JASON KINGSLEY

fun making it." The SNES game, coded by Nick Jones, remains probably the most impressive, with improved visuals, sound and a more accurate rendition of the film's backdrop, along with its open world structure and an ending that emulates the downbeat conclusion of the film. Also of note here is Sega's *Alien 3: The Gun*, a lightgun shooter that put the player in the role of a marine, sent in to investigate the events of the movie after they've transpired.

Next up for Probe was *Alien Trilogy*, but before we get to that, there's a big spin-off series to discuss, inspired by a set of fantastic comics from Dark Horse and a famous scene from the 1990 *Predator* sequel, in which an alien skull is glimpsed inside the antagonist's trophy cabinet.

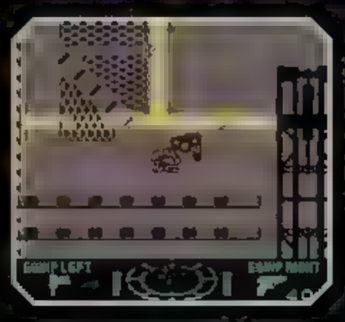
"We approached Alistair Bodin of Atari in Slough with a demo of a *Dragonflight 3D* game," says Rebellion cofounder Jason Kingsley, "and he was so impressed that he asked Bob Gleadow, the managing director, to come and look at it. They thought it was fantastic, and said it'd be great for their new Jaguar console – the first time we, and even Alistair, had heard about it." A few days later, Rebellion had its hands on a prototype development kit and the company was expanding to include permanent staff as it embraced two Jaguar exclusives from Atari: Formula One racing sim *Checkered Flag*, and *Alien Vs Predator*. "What we wanted to do was boil down the essence of the *Alien* and the *Predator* movies into the protagonists and the types of settings, and then add in the Colonial Marines so you have this three-way split," Jason continues. The result was a unique set of three factions, each heroic when played, regardless of their origins or objectives. The Predator hunts, as its culture demands, the chief Xenomorph aim is to reproduce, while the marines are left simply trying to survive by repelling the other two races. Despite not lifting any scenes directly from the movies, *Alien Vs Predator* is impressively evocative of the films, and sold an astonishing amount on the ill-fated Atari console. "I can't remember the exact number, but I think something like 84 per cent of people who bought a Jaguar bought *Alien Vs Predator*," notes Jason proudly, although this success failed to inspire an immediate sequel due to Atari's own struggles with its hardware.

Let's jump into hypersleep and leap forward five years to 1999. 20th Century Fox, impressed with Rebellion's *AVP* approached the developer to ask if it would be interested in developing a similar game on PC. With 3D graphics cards now transforming the home computer into a powerful gaming machine, the potential was there to greatly improve upon the 1994 game, most notably when the player controls the athletic aliens. "We did wall-walking and running, which was a huge technical achievement at the time," continues Jason, who helped make the decision to create three separate storylines for each race, replacing the first game's shared plot. "It was making a real rod for our own backs, because we had to make three games instead of one, and we couldn't have lower detail polygons on the ceiling because that would become the floor for the alien. But because it was all our own tech, we managed to make it work." *Aliens Versus Predator* became another smash, putting the British developer firmly on the map, yet with Fox Interactive preferring Monolith's engine for its sequel, Rebellion's next game in the series would come in 2007 with the PSP exclusive based on the second *AVP* movie, *Requiem*. At the same time, Rebellion worked with *Requiem*'s publisher, Vivendi, on another instalment in the main series, *AVP3*, before Vivendi's merger with Activision (forming Activision Blizzard) meant Sega Europe picked up the licence and the series effectively rebooted in 2010. "We had much better visual and audio fidelity and were able to significantly improve the AI and animations," notes Jason of this game. "Plus, the expectations of control systems were different because the industry had moved on, as had the complexity and depth of gameplay." Another success for Rebellion, this game marks the end of the publisher's distinguished association with the franchise, and it's a helluva sign off thanks in part to a gory selection of trophy kills. "They're not cute, cuddly creatures!" laughs Jason. "The source material is horror sci-fi, and we wanted to be faithful to that. The Predator skins people and hangs them upside down as trophies while polishing their skulls. It's not exactly nice!"

15 years earlier, the release of the three original films as a VHS boxset compelled Fox Interactive to devise *Alien Trilogy*, with Probe once more handling the majority of development duties. Merging much of *Aliens* with a dab of *Alien* and *Alien 3*, the extensive use of motion capture reflected the status the series now occupied. "We wanted to make a real blockbuster of a game," explains Joe Bonar, "as the franchise was so well-established by then. We worked with Wes Trager and his crew [at Acclaim Studios] to direct and produce mocapped aliens in their

ALIENS: THE THANATOS ENCOUNTER

GAME BOY COLOR



"The abandoned spaceship Thanatos has been occupied by aliens and must be cleared out," begins this 2001 Game Boy Color game from THQ and Australian dev Wicked Witch Software. Portrayed in a top-down viewpoint, it's a fun game with enough variation and nods to the movies to keep fans entertained.

ALIEN VS PREDATOR: REQUIEM

PSP

Rebellion was back in the chair for this PSP exclusive adaptation of the second *AVP* movie. "They didn't want us to put the big bad guy, the 'Pred-Alien', in the game to avoid spoilers for the movie, so we ended up replacing it with a tank for the end boss," Jason Kingsley remembers. "And then they put the big bad guy in the trailers for the movie!"

ALIENS: INFESTATION

NINTENDO DS

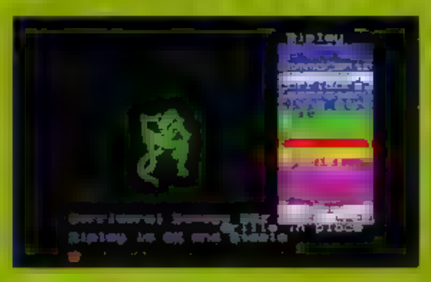
Developed alongside Gearbox's maligned *Colonial Marines* console game, *Infestation* takes place between the events of *Aliens* and *Alien 3* as the player investigates another derelict spacecraft, this time the USS Sulaco. A horizontally scrolling platformer, *Infestation* boasts a particularly graphic (and therefore pleasing) Chestburster scene.

SCARIEST MOMENTS

PANTS NOT WET ENOUGH FOR YOU? TRY OUR FIVE SPECIALLY SELECTED FRIGHTSOME SCENES FROM ALIEN GAMES

CORNERED IN THE MAZE

While the imagery is never likely to incur much fear in even the most timid of players, the Atari 2600 reimagination of *Alien* cranks up the tension with its constant pressuring tone and the hunting aliens, which can only ever be discouraged for a short time. Getting cornered is, as always, a bad idea.



OPEN VENTS

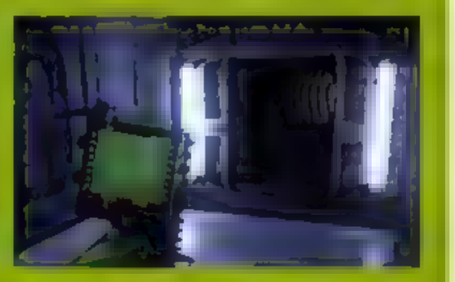
It's quiet in space. Very quiet. And in this 8-bit *Alien* game for the ZX Spectrum there are no screams, in fact very little sound at all apart from... what was that? A vent opening in the next room? Yes, the panel... it's been completely removed! Something was here. We should head inside and see what's going on.

OH, HE LIKES YOU...

This mashup of the first three movies in *Alien Trilogy* wisely focuses on the second instalment, as Ripley investigates the colony on LV-426. While there's little sign of the adult aliens to begin with, slipping out from behind boxes and barrels come the slithering little Facehuggers, eager to give you a big kiss.

BUG HUNT

Initially playing as an isolated marine, negotiating the dark and spooky corridors of *Aliens Vs Predator* is bad enough. But when your superior advises you switch to 'image intensifier mode' the world suddenly becomes even more frightening, before an alien pops up, right on cue. Definitely need more than harsh language here.



UGO READINGS

The motion scanner maximises the tension and its use in the games reached culmination in *Alien: Isolation*. Stalked by the Xeno, Amanda Ripley can use the device to detect its position, but beware, it can also give away your own location. Never have beeps and blurred visuals inspired so much eye-widening terror.

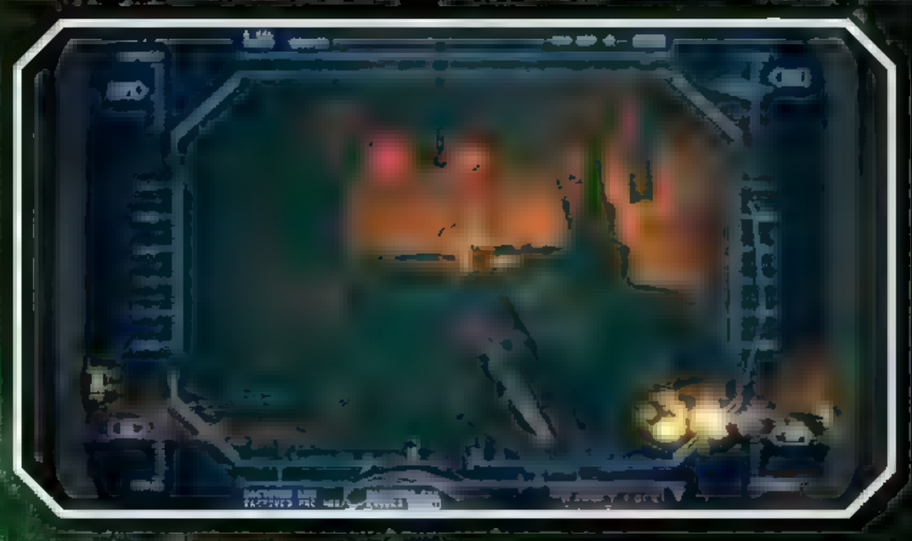
New York studio. It was an incredibly new and exciting technology back then, but expensive, and every reshoot or mistake would cost a bunch of money." Despite fellow Fox licence *Die Hard Trilogy* employing a variety of genres, Probe felt keeping the game consistent across all three movies would work better for *Alien Trilogy*. "We wanted to keep it dialled back a bit – okay, a lot – and the team worked bloody hard to get it done. It was a struggle given the new ground we were treading, but it turned out amazingly well." The result was an experience that, while slightly at odds with the plots of the films, manages to impressively reproduce the tension and environments of *Aliens* in particular.

1997 saw the fourth film of the franchise debut in cinemas and a new wave of derision and disenchantment from fans that even *Alien 3* had failed to inspire. Clumsily reintroducing Sigourney Weaver's deceased central character was bad enough for most; the mutant human/Xenomorph newborn of *Alien Resurrection* pushed the majority into barely disguised scorn for the famous series. For its PlayStation, Saturn and PC tie-in, Fox contracted another British developer, London-based Argonaut, which attempted to follow the film's protracted and constantly shifting script for an initial idea that emulated the PlayStation hit, *Loaded*. Alas, for Argonaut and Fox, the videogame landscape was shifting faster than a hungry Xenomorph, and complex third-person adventures such as *Resident Evil* and *Tomb Raider* were becoming the new benchmark. But it wasn't until one of *Alien Resurrection*'s designers suggested a shift to first-person that the game finally became workable, eradicating almost immediately a set of problems that ranged from poor camera angles to unwieldy AI. The result was a game that manages to trump its source material, at the same time introducing the left/right thumbstick combination popularised by *Halo* a year later, and still accepted as an industry standard control method almost a decade later.

Finally, in 2014, gamers got what many consider the most accurate elicitation of the franchise, harking back to the Argus Press game from 30 years earlier. *Alien: Isolation*, developed by Creative Assembly and released by Sega, is notable for an utter absence of the testosterone-fuelled soldiering that has featured heavily since 1986. "I think it was always the intention to move away from the gun-focused space marine version of the *Aliens* experience," notes Clive Lindop, lead designer on *Isolation*. "The stealth focus was at the heart of what the team wanted to build, with *Alien* as the guiding principal, the horror and fear being much more personal, a relentless alien hunting for you specifically." Creative Assembly's attention to detail, recreating every prop and location from the movies is a key element in sucking fans into its world. No longer can the player, representing a terrifyingly vulnerable Amanda Ripley, simply grab a pulse rifle and blast away – this is a menace that can never be destroyed, only evaded or temporarily discouraged with fire. "For the creative director, Al Hope, and the whole team, one of the primary goals was to reimbue the alien with the fear, horror and suspense of the original," explains Clive. "Rather than massed waves of Xenomorphs, could we make a single alien a terrifying entity to be hunted by, and return to the origins of the franchise?" Judging by the public feedback and critical acclaim, it's clear the developer's aims were met, and there are few gaming experiences as brutal and relentless as *Alien: Isolation*.

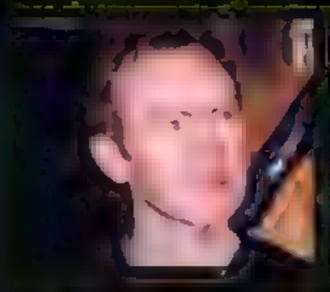
Today, while the cinematic bar may sit low, the potential for *Aliens* videogames remains high. "Ultimately, it's about humanity, human beings and dramatic moments," concludes Rebellion's Jason Kingsley. "There's a backstory that's implied, but it's all about human endeavour, and often human failing, and one heroic character succeeding. That's a trope that works well in videogames." Whether it's a towering predator, Colonial Marine or quivering Nostromo crew member, there's a host of videogames waiting for you to become that hero. Let's rock! ★

[PlayStation] Delayed and then cancelled on all formats save the PlayStation: *Alien: Resurrection*.



[Xbox 360] About to bring the pain in *Colonial Marines*.

THIS TIME IT'S REALLY WAR



RETRO GAMER CHATS TO GARY GILLIES, COCREATOR OF AN EXPERIENCE LIKE NO OTHER: THE TROCADERO'S TOTAL REALITY EXHIBITION, ALIEN WAR

What was *Alien War*?
It was a 20-minute walkthrough (with some running!), just like watching [an *Alien* movie] except you were there with the actors, the action and... the alien! The public were taken on a tour of the base and the creatures got loose, making it a race to survive.

Was it based on any of the movies?
I suppose *Aliens*, due to us having the marines in their armour together with the pulse rifles.

Using ten-millimetre explosive-tip caseless, we hope. Why base it in London's Trocadero?
Because it was in the centre of London, and it has a great basement, which apparently is haunted!

Is it true the experience began from your own personal *Alien* memorabilia collections?
It was my good friend John Gorman [co-creator of *Alien War*] who had a collection of items, and we had a display of props and costumes at a film theatre here in Glasgow. One day, after everyone had left, we were sitting in the dark and thought that rather than the items being in glass cases, would it not be much better if they were let loose and running about, actually part of the action?

You got Sigourney Weaver for *Alien War*'s opening! How did that happen?
We got to Sigourney by meeting her husband, who was doing a play in London, and he gave us her production company details. We got in touch and John and I went over to New York and met up with her and her agent, the mighty Sam Cohn, the top agent in the world! She was lovely. When John and I went to meet her at her hotel in London the day before *Alien War* opened, she could see we were under pressure and were so skinny, so she sat us down and got us something to eat and drink. Sigourney's a class act!

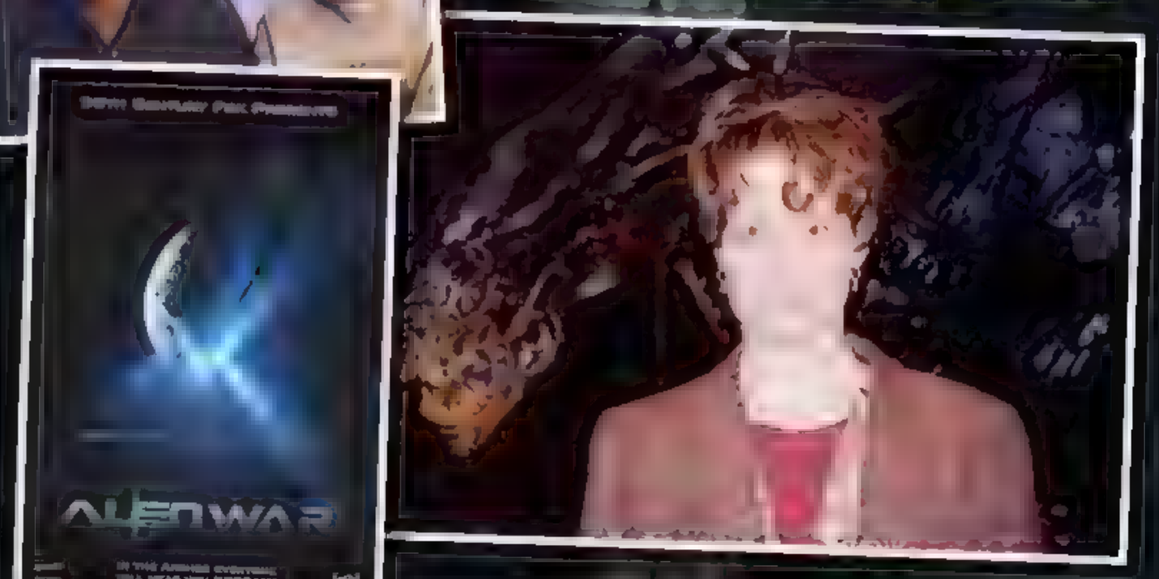
Million dollar question: favourite film in the series?
Aliens, and also *Prometheus*, which I loved. We managed to get onto the space jockey set and creature department as I had an ex-*Alien War* tech guy working on the set. I like all the questions it put up, the look and feel of the whole movie. Ridley [Scott, director] used on-set live guys in costumes whereas I felt *Covenant* was ruined by using CGI aliens. I wish it had been a true sequel to *Prometheus*.

What happened after the show ended?
We took a break, and I went back into music, John into film. Then, for the 15th anniversary, we brought it back to the Arches in Glasgow.

Do you think something similar could appear again?
We would love to do it again, and nearly did in London a few years ago. We had the contract and backing all in place, but then Madame Tussauds went to Fox and did a deal behind our back before opening a tame version in London.

"THE STEALTH FOCUS WAS AT THE HEART OF WHAT THE TEAM WANTED TO BUILD, WITH ALIEN AS THE GUIDING PRINCIPAL. THE HORROR AND FEAR BEING MUCH MORE PERSONAL"

CLIVE LINDOP



JACKY

Virtua Fighter 2

THE MADNESS MUST END

» MEGA DRIVE » 1996 » SEGA

I don't make any secret of the fact that I love Sega's *Virtua Fighter* series. I own some of the most bizarre and pointless releases in the franchise, like *Virtua Fighter Kids: GG Portrait Akira* for the Game Gear. I've watched the anime series more times than I care to admit, mostly because of the amusing English dub. I've got Japanese guide books, and even have my copy of *Virtua Fighter* signed by Yu Suzuki himself. So believe me, it pains me to make this request: Sega, *please* stop reissuing the Mega Drive version of *Virtua Fighter 2*.

Do you remember how everyone seemed to own a copy of *World Cup Italia 90*? It wasn't any good, but it was astonishingly common because it was included on no less than four compilation carts in Europe alone. Today, *Virtua Fighter 2* is the new *World Cup Italia 90* – the crap yet seemingly inescapable Mega Drive game that torments us wherever we roam. This compromised conversion features stilted animation, ropey voice effects, and a risible representation of what was state of the art fighting. Even the two new characters introduced in the arcade game aren't included. Yet for some strange reason, Sega has seen fit to include the 16-bit version of *Virtua Fighter 2* on three different Mega Drive compilations for other formats, and even chose to put it on the Mega Drive Mini recently.

I say enough is enough. Not only does it tarnish the name of a great fighting game, but given that it's the only *Virtua Fighter* product that Sega seems willing to release these days, it could actively be putting potential new fans off the series – after all, who would look at this rubbish and ask, "Why did they ever stop making these?" I've long said that if anyone at Sega wants to make my year, announcing the development of *Virtua Fighter 6* would be a fine way to do it. But the company could start off by making my day and conveniently forgetting the existence of the Mega Drive version of *Virtua Fighter 2* ★

SO YOU WANT TO COLLECT...

GAME GEAR PLATFORM GAMES

Sega's attempt to crack the handheld market didn't quite go to plan, but it did leave a legacy of some pretty fine platform games. We take a look at which ones will break the bank, which ones will batter your batteries, and the rare few that manage to do both

Words by Nick Thorpe

MEGA MONEY

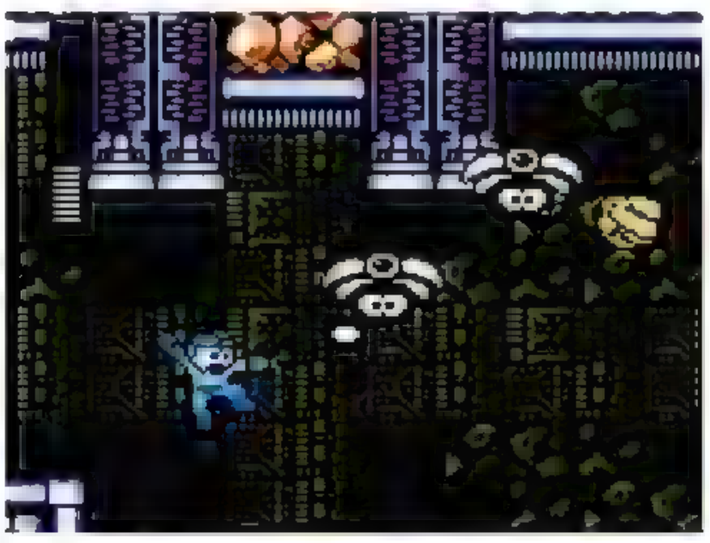
MEGA MAN

DEVELOPER: FREESTYLE
RELEASE: 995

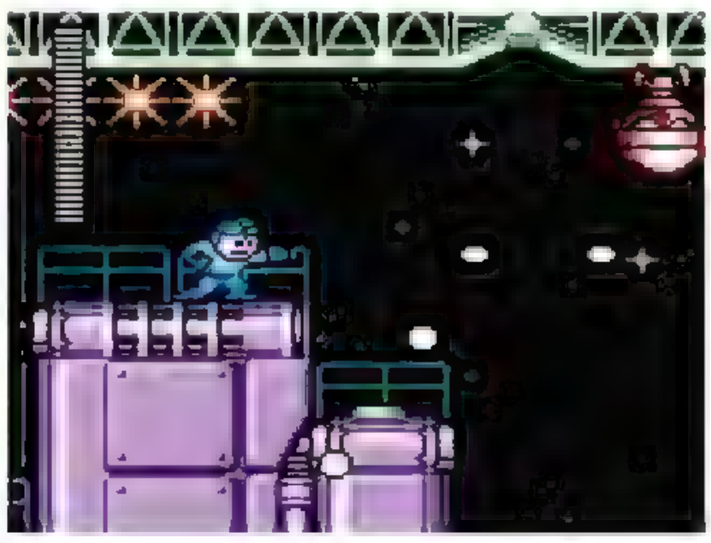
EXPECT TO PAY £480+ (USA)

There are quite a few rare and expensive entries in the *Mega Man* series, and the Blue Bomber's only Game Gear adventure just happens to be one of them. Published by US Gold under licence from Capcom, the game takes elements of *Mega Man 4* and *Mega Man 5* for the NES and mashes them together into a single game. Unfortunately, this isn't the greatest way to experience any of the content, as the game hasn't been adjusted for the smaller Game Gear screen The *Mega Man* games are already quite frustrating, and suddenly being unable to see where you're jumping and what is attacking you doesn't help in the slightest.

Owing to the relatively late release of the game and what appears to have been limited distribution, copies of *Mega Man* go for a very high price. If you're looking to spend your money wisely, we wouldn't recommend buying it – it's just not good enough. American copies of the game were imported into Portugal by local Sega distributor Ecofilmes – these can be distinguished by the Portuguese stickers on the box and the Portuguese instruction book.



» [Game Gear] The lower screen resolution here results in considerably more blind jumping than in the NES games.



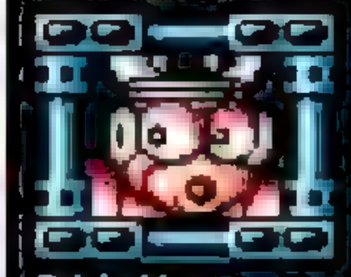
» [Game Gear] Few stages have much in the way of visual improvement over their NES originals.

COALITION OF CHAOS

The first four Robot Masters you'll need to defeat

Stone Man
Unfortunately, this guy isn't a laid-back drug enthusiast that'll go away if you give him Pringles. Instead, he's a boss that's built like the proverbial brick outhouse. He's weak to the Napalm Bomb, so go grab that before you fight him.

Napalm Man
This particular boss loves the smell of himself in the morning, which is pretty weird when you think about it. His special weapon is a bouncing bomb, which is funny because actual napalm isn't explosive or bouncy at all.



Bright Man
He's bright because he's clever, and he's also bright because he's literally got a light bulb on his head. While he looks like a berk, his enemy-freezing Flash Stopper power is actually pretty useful for negotiating tricky rooms.

Star Man
Star Man is built for outer space exploration, but his love of opera and musicals suggests that he thinks of himself as a rather different kind of star. The Power Stone works well against him, so beat Stone Man first.

GOTTA GO FAST

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2

EXPECT TO PAY £7+ (EUROPE)

DEVELOPER: ASPECT
RELEASE: 1992

■ The Game Gear is unlike most other Sega systems, in that complete boxed copies of games are significantly rarer than the r loose counterparts thanks to the rather more disposable cardboard boxes they came in. Bearing that in mind, this is one of the cheaper games on the market – a comp ete copy of *Sonic*'s sequel shouldn't set you back more than a tenner, making it the bread and butter of any Game Gear collection. As many people will know, the game is wholly distinct from its 16-bit counterpart. All of the stages and bosses are brand new, and Tails is a hostage rather than a sidekick. The only blemish of note is the game's d fficu ty, as it's one of the hardest games in a traditionally gentle series. Many players find that the first boss is an inordinately tricky opponent, and the challenge only escalates from there.

EXPECT TO PAY £5+ (USA & JAPAN)

» [Game Gear] Some of you have never seen this boss defeated. We're feeling generous.

SWING AND A MISS

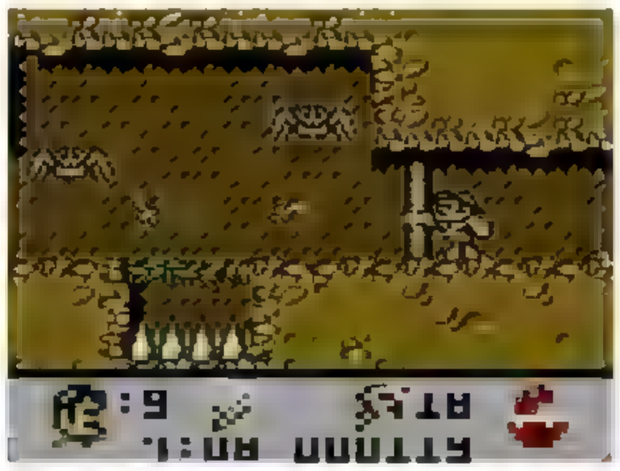
TARZAN: LORD OF THE JUNGLE

EXPECT TO PAY £300+ (EUROPE)

DEVELOPER: EUROCOM
RELEASE: 1994

■ Some games command high prices because they are extraordinarily good. Others attract high valuations simply because they're rare. This is a case of the latter. *Tarzan: Lord Of The Jungle* was only released in Europe, for the Game Boy and Game Gear. Perhaps owing to the differing fortunes of the systems, the Game Boy version is reasonably common and can be had for sensible prices, whereas the Game Gear version is very rare and will set you back an insane amount of cash. The experience you'll receive does not in any way justify that high price – Tarzan is a pretty mediocre platform game. Any fun that you might have swinging from vines is quickly replaced by frustration, thanks to irritating level design and tedious objectives. Unless you're going for a complete collection, avoid it.

» [Game Gear] The backdrop here is as bland as the game design, which is saying a lot.



» [Game Gear] There are worse ways to spend £300, although we're struggling to think of them.

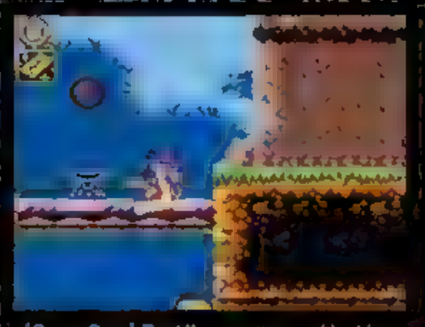
MATTERS OF IMPORT

KISHIN DOUJI ZENKI

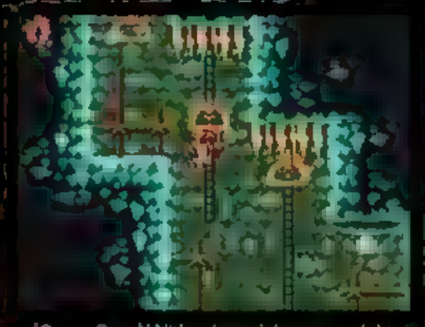
EXPECT TO PAY £35+ (JAPAN)

DEVELOPER: SEGA
RELEASE: 1995

■ This adaptation of the popular Nineties manga series isn't quite as revered as its PC-FX cousin, which is considered to be one of the finest games on its platform, but it's a very good licensed game that isn't widely recognised in this part of the world. The graphics and sound are both excellent for the hardware, and the game design is interesting due to the differing abilities of the two main characters – they can access different areas and even find totally unique exits. This game appears to be creeping up in value – the last time we looked at it, when we featured it in a Minority Report a little over a year ago, copies were going for £15 to £25. You'd be lucky to get it under that higher figure on eBay or Yahoo Auctions Japan based on recent sales, so we've revised the expected price upwards.



» [Game Gear] *Zenki* is a pretty good looking game on Sega's 8-bit handheld.



» [Game Gear] With prices rising, you might want to snap this up quickly.

MEET THE HEROES

The dynamic duo you'll lead through this adventure

ZENKI

The titular warrior is centuries old and immensely powerful, as you'll see during boss fights where he assumes his adult form and wields potent elemental magic. Unfortunately for those around him, he spends most of his time as a rather unruly child. He's less agile than Chiaki, but he's a more effective combatant due to his rolling attacks, and he can access alternative routes by destroying blocks from above and squeeze into small spaces.

CHIAKI

Zenki's companion is a pretty normal high school girl, who lives at a shrine with her grandmother. In the game, her fire abilities let her attack enemies and destroy power-up containers, and she can jump higher than Zenki. In the storyline, Chiaki is also responsible for transforming Zenki into his demon god form for boss fights. Although she doesn't participate in these, she does get her own story spotlight partway through the game.

COLLECTING TIPS!

Drop the box
If you want to save money on your collection, it's worth noting the premium prices placed on boxed games. Getting loose carts will save you loads.

Roam the regions
Game Gear games are not region-locked, so feel free to hunt down the cheapest versions of games. Some games do differ on Japanese consoles, such as *Ristar*.

Embrace the wait
Compared to other systems, Game Gear prices seem volatile and there appears to be little received wisdom as to game values, so patience will yield bargains.

Master the systems
Thanks to the Master Gear converter, it's possible to play Master System cartridges on the Game Gear. Consider these if Game Gear versions are expensive.

WHEN YOU WISH UPON A...

RISTAR

EXPECT TO PAY £50+ (JAPAN)

EXPECT TO PAY £40+ (USA)

DEVELOPER: JAPAN SYSTEM HOUSE
RELEASE: 1995

By this point, most players know that the Mega Drive version of *Ristar* was a great game, albeit one that didn't get the reputation it deserved thanks to the saturated platform game market of the mid-Nineties. But the Game Gear version is *also* great, and while it has plenty in common with its 16-bit sibling, it does provide its own take on the concept. As well as grabbing and headbutting enemies, Ristar can grab objects and lob them at enemies, or throw spears into walls to create temporary platforms. The game also offers rejigged level layouts, as well as some exclusive stages and bosses. It's definitely one of the better platform games on the system, but it's not one that comes super cheap.

EXPECT TO PAY £40+ (EUROPE)

» [Game Gear] You won't find this stage in the Mega Drive game – it's only on the Game Gear version.

» [Game Gear] *Ristar*'s stretchy arms are his key selling point, and his abilities carry down to the 8-bit platform intact.

LOST LEVEL
The stage your console won't let you play

Although Game Gear games aren't region-locked, the systems do contain regional identification and some games respond to it. In most cases the differences are minor – for example, a game may display Japanese text on Japanese systems. But *Ristar* offers more than that for owners of Japanese consoles, as a stage was inexplicably cut for international audiences. On non-Japanese systems, the second planet is called Terra and features a single pirate-themed stage. In Japan, the planet is called Fantum and opens with a fantasy land of clouds, rainbows and beanstalks, before proceeding to the pirate stage. All Game Gear *Ristar* carts contain exactly the same data, so you won't need to track down a Japanese copy of the game to play this extra stage – just a Japanese system.

MINIGUN

GUNSTAR HEROES

EXPECT TO PAY £65+ (JAPAN)

DEVELOPER: M2
RELEASE: 1995

Gunstar Heroes occupies an odd spot in the Game Gear library, as it's technically very impressive and plays well, but it's not particularly easy to recommend as it's just a conversion of a game that ultimately plays better on the Mega Drive. We would be incredibly surprised if anyone would suggest that you choose this version of *Gunstar Heroes* over the original. However, if you do already own that classic, this conversion certainly makes for an interesting companion piece – in order to make a technically impressive Mega Drive game work within the confines of the Game Gear, developer M2 had to make some alterations to the original game's design. This doesn't exclusively mean cutbacks though, as M2 implemented new sections such as a part where you command a giant walking robot. *Gunstar Heroes* was released pretty late in the system's life and never got a release outside of Japan, so demand keeps the price of this game pretty high

» [Game Gear] This surprisingly accurate conversion does suffer from some heavy sprite flickering.

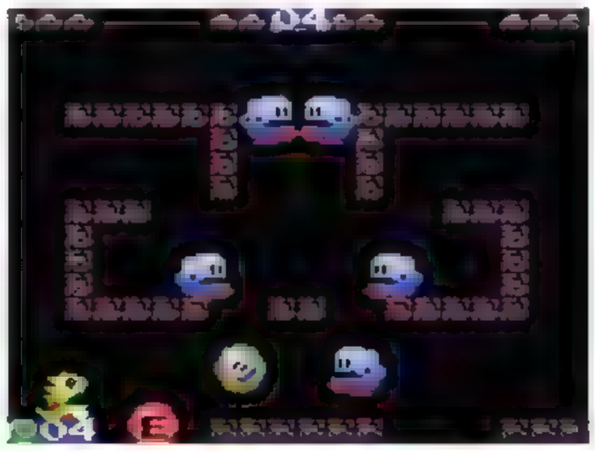
ARCADE ACTION

BUBBLE BOBBLE

EXPECT TO PAY £160+ (USA)

DEVELOPER: TAITO
RELEASE: 1994

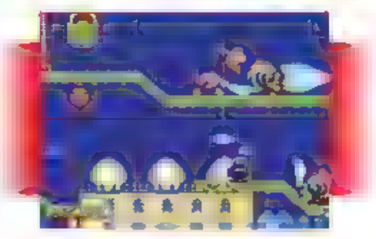
This one's a bit of an oddity, really. *Bubble Bobble* was hardly the newest and hottest game on the market by the time the Game Gear version was released in 1994 – it's the sort of game you'd have expected to see considerably earlier in the system's life. It was also an American exclusive, which is quite odd. The game itself is a good version, with the only real knock against it being the level layouts, which have had to be adjusted to fit the smaller screen while the sprites have stayed pretty large. But the strangest thing about *Bubble Bobble* is that while it's an easy game to find, it's a hard game to find complete. The price difference is astronomical – a loose cart goes for $20 or less, but the box, manual and inner tray can multiply its value tenfold. *Bubble Bobble* is great but that is enormously steep, so think very carefully about whether you want that cardboard.



» [Game Gear] The adjusted layouts do resemble the originals pretty well, all things considered.

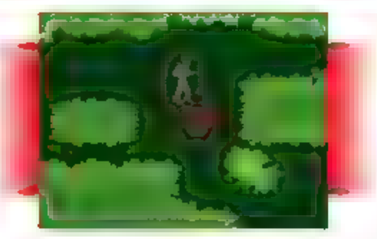
MORE GAMES TO CONSIDER

COCA-COLA KID
DEVELOPER: ASPECT
RELEASED: 1994
EXPECT TO PAY:
£25+ (JAPAN)

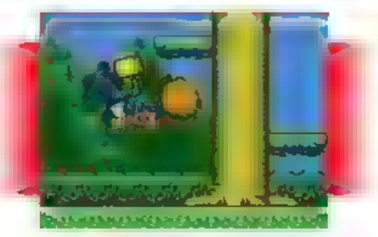


DYNAMITE HEADDY
DEVELOPER: MINATO GIKEN
RELEASED: 1994
EXPECT TO PAY:
£13+ (EUROPE) **£20+** (US) **£20+** (JAPAN)

HURRICANES
DEVELOPER: ARC DEVELOPMENTS
RELEASED: 1994
EXPECT TO PAY:
£110+ (EUROPE)



THE LOST WORLD: JURASSIC PARK
DEVELOPER: SEGA
RELEASED: 1997
EXPECT TO PAY:
£30+ (US)



THE LUCKY DIME CAPER STARRING DONALD DUCK
DEVELOPER: SEGA
RELEASED: 1991
EXPECT TO PAY:
£10+ (EUROPE, **£20+** (JS) **£13+** (JAPAN)

BELIEVE YOUR EYES

CASTLE OF ILLUSION STARRING MICKEY MOUSE

EXPECT TO PAY £15+ (JAPAN)

EXPECT TO PAY £10+ (EUROPE)

DEVELOPER: SNK
RELEASE: 1993

EXPECT TO PAY £20+ (USA)

■ Sega made a bunch of really good Disney platform games back in the early Nineties, and this is arguably the most famous of the lot – although most people do tend to talk more about the Mega Drive version. However, as with some of the other games featured here, the 8-bit version is distinct enough to merit discussion, with different level layouts and boss fights as well as a nonlinear progression structure. This is the sort of game that forms the bedrock of any Game Gear platform collection – it's cheap and it's very good, so after the ultra-common *Sonic* games this should be the next item on your list. If you already have the Master System version, don't expect any noteworthy differences as the Game Gear game actually runs in Master System compatibility mode, too

» [Game Gear] Mickey, much like our esteemed editor, is excellent at destroying things with his bum.

THAT'S TELEKINESIS, KYLE

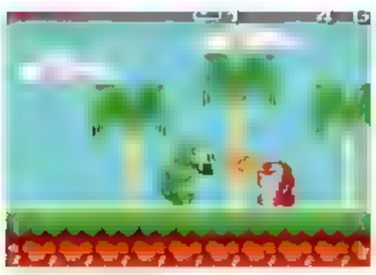
WONDER BOY: THE DRAGON'S TRAP

EXPECT TO PAY £10+

DEVELOPER: WESTONE
RELEASE: 1992

EXPECT TO PAY £45+ (JAPAN)

■ By now, regular readers will know that we're pretty big fans of this classic platform adventure, and it's an all too often overlooked key milestone in the evolution of the 'Metroidvania' style. Few games of the era have such masterful design, as new animal forms grant abilities that allow the player to pass previously insurmountable obstacles. Coupled with attractive graphics and an excellent soundtrack, it's essential. This version has some slight changes compared to the Master System original, the most noticeable being that the game's stages have been redesigned to account for the Game Gear's lower screen resolution. Still, they don't particularly diminish the experience. For some reason, American audiences were denied this particular treat, and the Japanese version contains Japanese text as you might expect, so most players should stick with the European release



» [Game Gear] If you'd just been turned into a lizard, you'd have a fiery temper too.

HARD BOILED

THE EXCELLENT DIZZY COLLECTION

EXPECT TO PAY £60+ (EUROPE COMPLETE)

DEVELOPER: TECHNOS
RELEASE: 1995

ADDED BONUSES

The other games in the collection

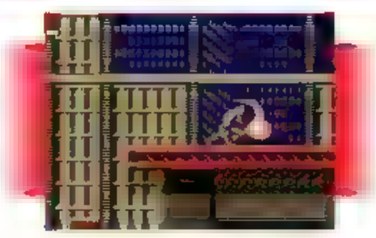
EXPECT TO PAY £140+ (EUROPE COMPLETE)

PANIC DIZZY

GO! DIZZY GO!

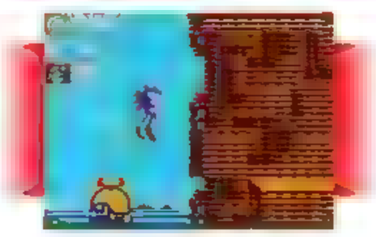
MARKO'S MAGIC FOOTBALL

DEVELOPER: DOMARK
RELEASED: 1994
EXPECT TO PAY:
£60+ (EURO)



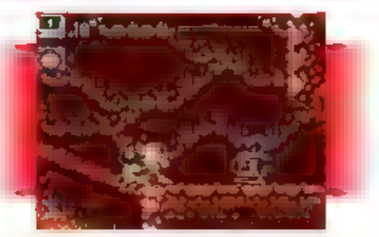
SHINOBI II: THE SILENT FURY

DEVELOPER: SEGA
RELEASED: 1994
EXPECT TO PAY:
£20+ (EUROPE) **£35+** (US) **£25+** (JAPAN)



SONIC THE HEDGEHOG TRIPLE TROUBLE

DEVELOPER: RACDYM
RELEASED: 1995
EXPECT TO PAY:
£30+ (EUROPE) **£20+** (US) **£15+** (JAPAN)



TAILS ADVENTURE

DEVELOPER: ASPECT
RELEASED: 1995
EXPECT TO PAY:
£250+ (EUROPE) **£150+** (US) **£70+** (JAPAN)

TEMPO JR

DEVELOPER: SIMS
RELEASED: 1995
EXPECT TO PAY:
£150+ (EUROPE) **£100+** (US) **£30+** (JAPAN)

Bluffer's Guide To

Cyberpunk

Jack in with us and take a journey through cyberspace as we hack the history of a dystopic genre that's turned out to offer an eerily accurate reflection of technology-soaked world we live in today

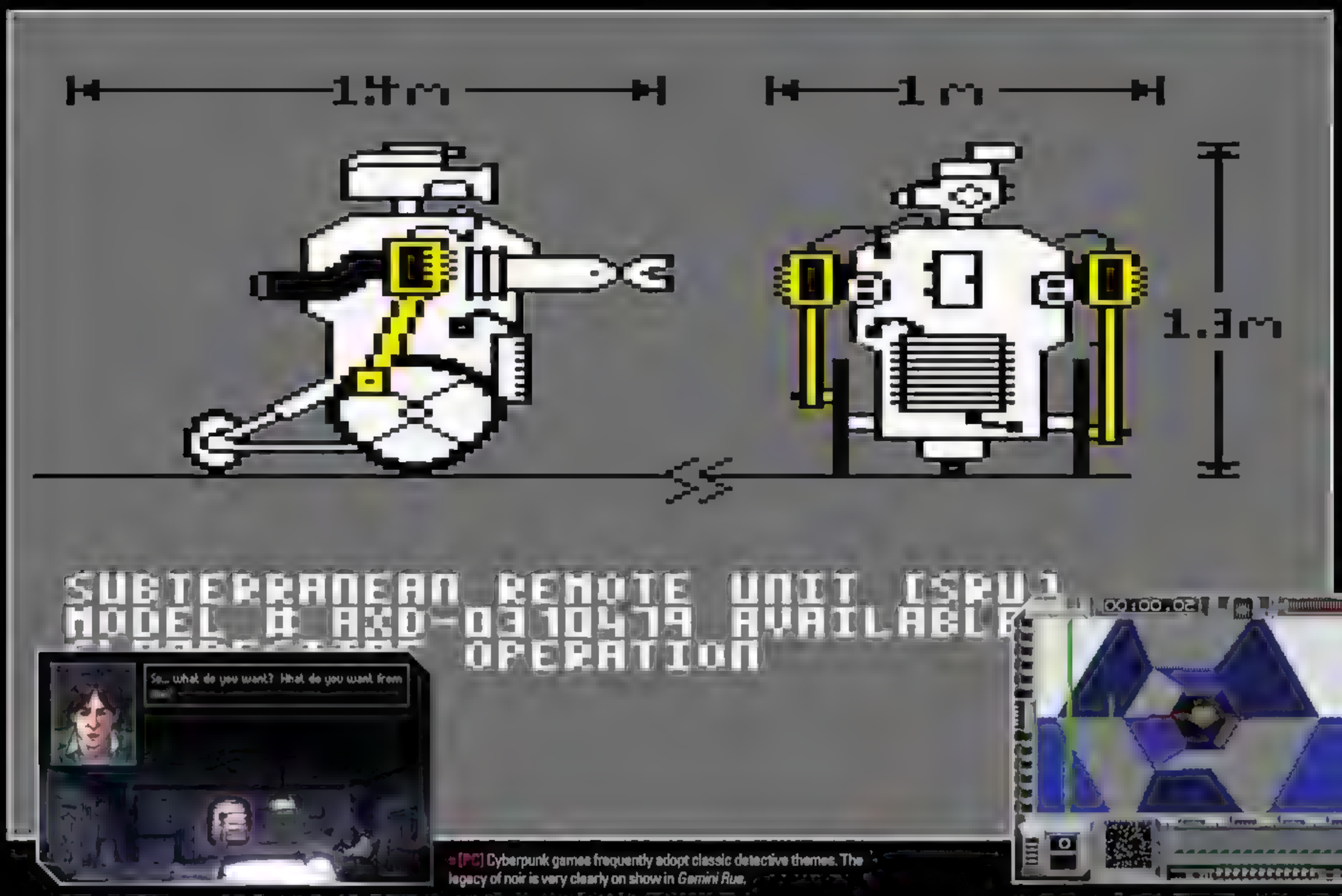
Words By Paul Walker-Emig

Steve Cartwright

Jordan Weisman

Greg Kasavin

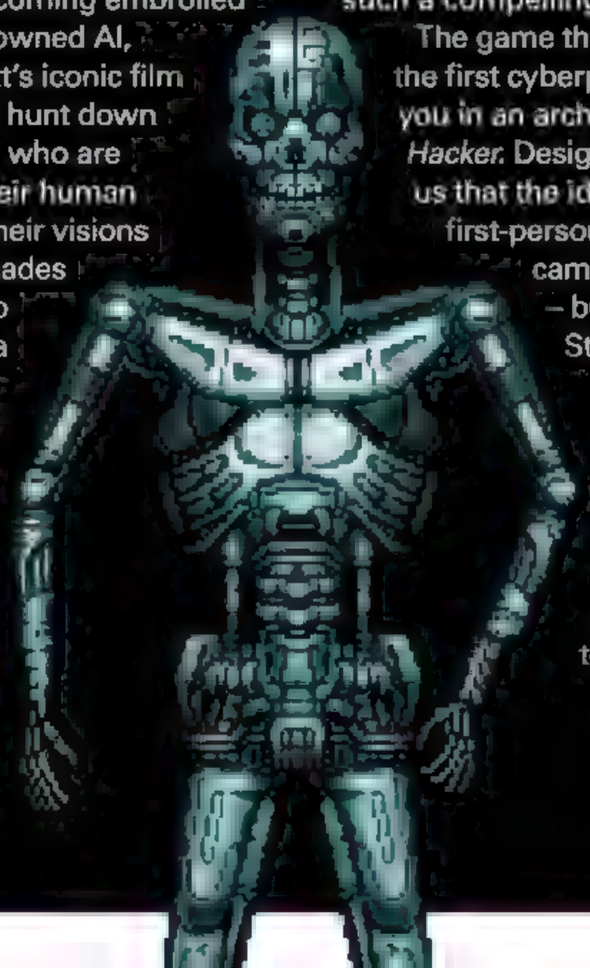
Jordi De Paco



[Amstrad CPC] You can't make progress in *Hacker* until you've identified specific parts of this robot. It's harder than it sounds, and highlights the game's methodical gaming approach.

[PC] Cyberpunk games frequently adopt classic detective themes. The legacy of noir is very clearly on show in *Gemini Rue*.

What is cyberpunk? On the one hand, it refers to an aesthetic: neon lights, decaying urban sprawl, gleaming corporate towers, dyed hair, leather clothes, artificial limbs, gangs of thugs roaming streets where the architecture of Tokyo and the sensibilities of hardboiled fiction collide. It also refers to a preoccupation with certain themes: the impact of technology and the internet on ourselves and our society, and the dystopic implications of corporations becoming the locus of power in societies riddled with corruption and injustice. These contours were defined in the Eighties by two foundational texts in William Gibson's novel about a cyberspace hacker becoming embroiled in a heist to steal a corporate-owned AI, *Neuromancer*, and Ridley Scott's iconic film about a man whose job it is to hunt down androids known as 'replicants' who are near-indistinguishable from their human counterparts, *Blade Runner*. Their visions have resonated across the decades and continue to feel relevant to this day. Given that we live in a world increasingly shaped by the power of the internet, a world where our relationship with technology has only grown more intimate and where corporations are more powerful than ever, its not hard to see why.



In light of the genre's affinity for technology, it is fitting that cyberpunk is a territory that's been well explored in videogames. It would be impossible for us to touch on every game with a cyberpunk influence – the genre's influence has been so extensive that it's difficult to find any piece of modern sci-fi without a touch of cyberpunk in it – but we'll still be able to guide you through the key titles in the history of cyberpunk games and explore how these seminal games bring out different elements of what makes cyberpunk such a compelling style and genre.

> "I had a play mechanic – but still no purpose or plot"
> STEVE CARTWRIGHT

The game that can stake a claim as being the first cyberpunk title is one that places you in an archetypal cyberpunk role: 1985's *Hacker*. Designer Steve Cartwright tells us that the idea of controlling a robot in first-person and navigating a world map came first. "I had a play mechanic – but still no purpose or plot," Steve tells us.

"About this time I went to see the movie *War Games*," Steve recalls. "If you remember, the premise of that movie was that a kid breaks into a secret government computer system to play a game. I thought that simulating the entire sequence of starting up a modem and logging onto a computer system would make a fantastic opening to the game.

"In fact, the first time the game was demonstrated to the press, I told them I just needed to connect to the Activision computer system for a quick update before I could show them the game," Steve continues. "Then I acted as if something had gone wrong, and I was somehow connecting to some unknown computer system. All the press bought the premise – and were completely surprised when we revealed that what they had just seen was, in fact, the opening to the game."

The hacker is a key archetype in cyberpunk fiction. It is a figure who exists in a world defined by cyberspace, a thief for the internet age who can manipulate technological structures of power in favour of the underdogs – a perennial theme of the genre. It's no surprise, then, that *Hacker* is far from the only game to focus in on this aspect. 1989 Atari ST, Amiga and PC title *Interphase* depicts a world where people can experience corporate-created 'dreamtracks' and puts you in the role of a 'dreamer' who discovers they are being used to smuggle subliminal messages. The game switches between a 2D map and a 3D cyberspace world where you can disable real-world obstacles like security cameras and fight enemy ships that represent cyber defences. That might not sound ▶

like an accurate conception of hacking, but this visual representation of the internet as a space of 3D objects that the hacker navigates like a pilot is very similar to the way cyberspace is represented in *Neuromancer* – William Gibson, like most people at the time, did not have a good conception of how computers worked.

Introversion Software's 2001 game *Uplink* sees you build up a network of servers across the world as you take on missions and build up a library of hacking programs – such as password breakers, log deleters and firewall breakers – that you can use to break into new systems. 2015's *Hacknet* built on this, offering a similar structure, but with the significant addition of 'real' unix-based coding. The game's success in teaching complete amateurs some basic coding is not only impressive but also makes you feel cool as hell.

The same can be said of 2016's *Quadrilateral Cowboy*, a self-described "20th century cyberpunk" fiction where you pull off heists in a dystopia infused with dark humour, armed with a trusty laptop that can be used to hack cameras, doors and other security systems using basic programming, and 2018's *Exapunks*, where you solve puzzles using programming to navigate computer networks and earn cash to fund the medication you need to stop you succumbing to the 'Phage', a disease that turns bodies into computerised components – you can't get much more cyberpunk than that!

2013's *Gunpoint* and 2017's *Observer* offer a more accessible representation of the idea of hacking, the former is a platformer that lets you switch to a mode where you can reconfigure electrical circuits to open up new areas and mess with guards, the latter is a horror game where you play as a neural detective that can hack into the minds of suspects to gather evidence.

Returning to the Eighties, the early days of cyberpunk gaming featured plenty of titles directly inspired or licensed from other media. The Bitmap Brothers' famously violent fictional sport created for 1988's *Speedball* and 1990's *Speedball 2:*

TIMELINE

1985
The release of *Hacker* early in the life of cyberpunk allows it to lay claim to arguably being the first game in the genre.

1988
We get two official adaptations this year in *Neuromancer* and the *RoboCop* arcade game, along with the obviously *Rollerball*-inspired *Speedball*.

1990
RoboCop 2 enters our homes and we get the first *Terminator* videogame on DOS PCs.

1993
In a golden year for cyberpunk strategy, we get *Syndicate* on PC and Amiga and the first *Shadowrun* game on SNES.

1994
System Shock takes us to a space station haunted by a rogue AI, Revolution Software collaborates with artist Dave Gibbons on *Beneath A Steel Sky* and *Shadowrun* makes its way to the Mega Drive.

1996
Shadowrun continues and moves onto another console, the Mega-CD, and *The Terminator: Skynet* follows up impressively on the previous year's *Future Shock*.

1997
Blade Runner finally gets the videogame adaptation it deserves and *Syndicate Wars* hits the PlayStation.

1998
SiN offers innovation in the realm of the FPS with area-specific damage and the ability to disarm enemies.

2000
If *Blade Runner* is the definitive cyberpunk film and *Neuromancer* the definitive cyberpunk novel, *Deus Ex* might just be the definitive cyberpunk game.

2001
In a bumper year for cyberpunk, we get hacking game *Uplink*, turn-based RPG *Anachronox*, third-person action game *Oni* and cyberspace-esque shooter *Rez*.

WHAT MAKES A GREAT CYBERPUNK GAME?

How to spot the best games in the genre

Corporate power: Those gleaming towers in the distance represent the corporate power that looms large over every cyberpunk dystopia.

Underdogs: Cyberpunk typically sees an underdog, or several, going up against the system, whether its a hacker, street thug, thief or a former nobody finding their way.

Technological enhancements: Some kind of cybernetic advancement has to exist in a cyberpunk world, which offers a great excuse for some cool gameplay mechanics.

Brutal Deluxe gestured towards the existence of a brutal dystopic world that was obviously inspired by the 1975 film, and cyberpunk progenitor, *Rollerball*. 1988 was also the year that gave us the first *RoboCop* videogame in the arcades, soon followed by a home version in *RoboCop 2* for the Amiga, C64, Spectrum and NES, among others. That would be followed by many sequels and some dodgy reboots, such as the awful 2003 Xbox, PC and PS2 FPS. *Terminator*'s first videogame adaptation came out in 1991 and, again, got plenty of sequels. For our purposes, the most interesting are those that zeroed in on the more cyberpunk-heavy future aspects. Bethesda's 1995 FPS *The Terminator: Future Shock* and its 1996 follow-up *The Terminator: Skynet* deserve more recognition than they get for their strong atmosphere, pioneering use of mouse-look controls and innovative open structure.

Perhaps the most significant cyberpunk adaptations of the Eighties, however, is that of William Gibson's iconic novel, *Neuromancer*, released on Apple II and Commodore 64 in 1988 – Amiga, Apple IIGS and PC versions followed. "Gibson wasn't a computer user and said he'd rather leave everything up to us," says designer Bruce Balfour on the freedom the team were given in developing the game. "Technical limitations were the main challenge. Remember, we were just a couple of years out of the Infocom text adventure phase of game development, and static graphic interfaces were the norm, with text parser descriptions and actions. Troy

Rollerball is a clear influence of *Speedball* and it's sequel *Speedball 2: Brutal Deluxe*.

TIMELINE

2011

The legendary *Deus Ex* series returns with a prequel featuring a new protagonist, and point-and-click *Gemini Rue* wins critical acclaim.

2013

Shadowrun makes its return to the stage with the aptly named *Shadowrun Returns*, and *Remember Me* has us remixing memories, while *Gunpoint* proves it's a surprise indie hit.

2014

Supergiant follows up on the steampunk *Bastion* by shifting to cyberpunk with *Transistor*, and *Shadowrun* continues on with *Shadowrun: Dragonfall*.

2015

Gemini Rue publisher Wadjet Eye releases another cyberpunk point-and-click in *Technobabylon*, *Hacknet* builds on the work done by *Uplink*, and *Syndicate* makes something of a return in the guise of *Satellite Reign*.

2016

Deus Ex: Mankind Divided is released, along with a couple of well-received cyberpunk indies in *Va-11 Hall-A* and *Quadrilateral Cowboy*.

2017

Cyberpunk gets dark with the *Hotline Miami*-inspired *Ruiner* and futuristic horror-detective title *Observer*.

2018

Detroit: Beyond Human is the biggest name cyberpunk game of the year, but we also get treated to indie adventure *The Red Strings Club* and hacking game *Exapunks*.

2019

Katana Zero gives us a samurai sword, instant deaths and flashy neon lights in a hyper-intense 2D action platformer.

2020

CD Projekt Red's anticipated first-person cyberpunk RPG *Cyberpunk 2077* is due to be released.

Miles managed to squeeze simple character animations in there along with the 8-bit version of Devo's music track *Some Things Never Change*, which was about to be released on their album.

"[Brian] Fargo and [Michael] Stackpole had worked out the idea of putting adventure and RPG elements together for the game, so that interactions in the real world, or 'meat space', were required to get access to, and advance in, the cyberspace/matrix world," Bruce continues, in reference to the game's marriage of two gameplay styles. "That was also the best way to approximate what happened in the novel. We also figured that players who hadn't read the book needed a means to be introduced to the concepts, so we put a lot of time into training them to make the gradual transitions from meat space to acquire or upgrade equipment; then to the somewhat familiar online bulletin boards to receive emails and locate information, codes, money and new software; then to the matrix itself where they worked with the RPG interface for combat with the defences protecting all the cool stuff. They had to go back and forth between these game levels, of course, while collecting money, objects and experience."

The favourably received title made good use of its source material, going a step beyond the likes of the *RoboCop* adaptations, for example, where the cyberpunk setting was little more than an alternative backdrop for another side-scrolling shooter. This kickstarted a long and healthy tradition of cyberpunk adventure games, many of which took great care exploring cyberpunk's key themes.

1994 PC and Amiga title *Beneath A Steel Sky* tells a story of corporate cold war set in a city that offers its own unique take on the stark inequalities often displayed in cyberpunk, with the poor confined to higher levels of the city and the rich at the bottom, and picks up on cyberpunk's interest in the distortion of the boundaries between organic and artificial with the reveal of a half-man/half-machine entity that controls the city. It's a city we look forward to returning to in the recently announced sequel, *Beyond A Steel Sky*.

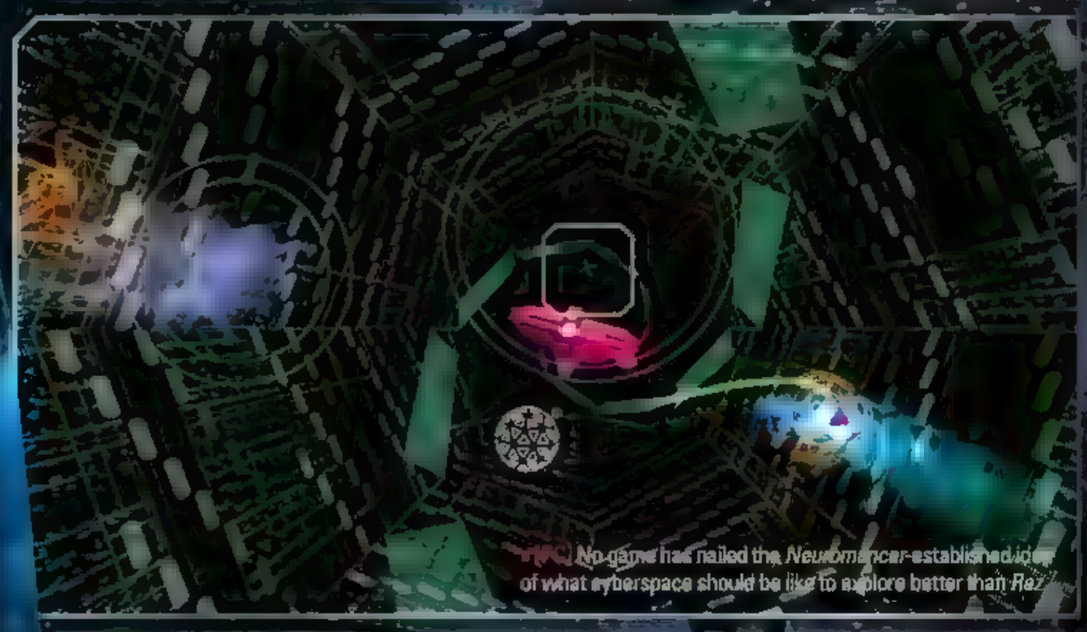
The Hideo Kojima-led *Snatcher*, which came out in Japan in 1988 but is more familiar to western audiences from its 1994 and 1996 Mega-CD and PlayStation releases, took a whole chunk of pages out of *Blade Runner*'s book with its setting, story and Rick Deckard-looking protagonist, to present a detective mystery about robots taking the place of humans.

Speaking of *Blade Runner*, that franchise got its own adventure game adaptation in 1997. It captured the atmosphere of the movie beautifully and did a great job of situating its own unique story within the film's established setting. Famously, the game found a smart way of tapping into the idea, established in the movie, that you never knew who could be a replicant by changing who the replicant was every time you played.

A steady steam of cyberpunk adventures have continued to explore the rich thematic potentials of the genre.

The Longest Journey series, kicked off in 2000 and most recently revisited in 2014 in *Dreamfall Chapters*, critiques corporate power via the cyberpunk-inspired world of Stark; 2011's critically acclaimed *Gemini Rue* explores the unreliability of memory in a digital age; 2015's *Technobabylon* and *2064: Read Only Memories* both use murder

This hacking section in *Red Strings Club* is a real highlight for us



No game has nailed the *Neuromancer*-established idea of what cyberspace should be like to explore better than *Rez*

> "I find cyberpunk interesting for a lot of reasons: extraordinary technology is a great tool to develop both interesting narratives and gameplay mechanics"
> JORDI DE PACO

mysteries and shady conspiracies to tap into cyberpunk's ever-relevant anxieties about AI; and 2016's *VA-11 HALL-A* is a bartending sim that explores the personal lives of those living in a cyberpunk dystopia. 2018's *Detroit: Become Human* showed that the appeal of the cyberpunk adventure is not limited to the indie space, offering a blockbuster (though arguably less sophisticated) take on the blurring of boundaries between humanity and technology. Oh, and there's also the *Tex Murphy* games, which kicked off in 1989 with *Mean Streets* on PC and C64, and basically took the piss out of the whole detective cyberpunk thing.

Deconstructeam's *The Red Strings Club* is another recent adventure that showcases the interesting storytelling potentials inherent to the cyberpunk setting. The game is comprised of three sections – one where you play a bartender mixing drinks to manipulate customers' emotions, one where you craft implants to change people's characteristics and one where you phone hack your way to uncovering information. We ask creative director Jordi De Paco about the appeal that keeps developers returning to the genre. "I find cyberpunk interesting for a lot of reasons: extraordinary technology is a great tool to develop both interesting narratives and gameplay mechanics, and cyberpunk's decadent vibe is perfect to channel our worries as individuals and as a society," he replies.

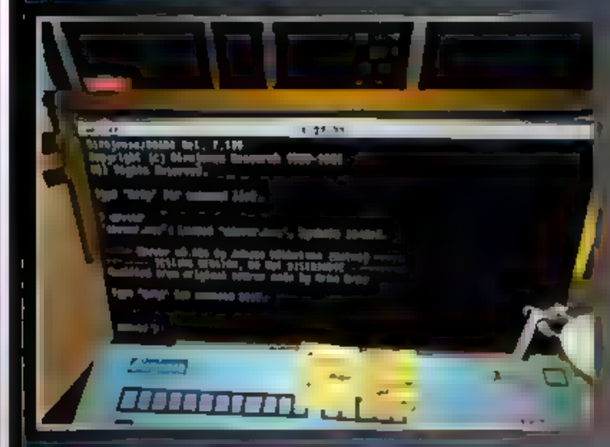
"The game is built upon the theme of manipulation," Jordi continues. "It's about

ESSENTIAL CYBERPUNK

Futuristic worlds worth paying a visit to

DEUS EX

Deus Ex hits every note you'd expect from a classic piece of cyberpunk fiction: conspiracy, AI, human augmentation, hacking, growing inequality, rough urban locales and more. It's also a classic game in its own right, lauded for the freedom and flexibility it offers to players through the cybernetic enhancements you choose to upgrade protagonist JC Denton.

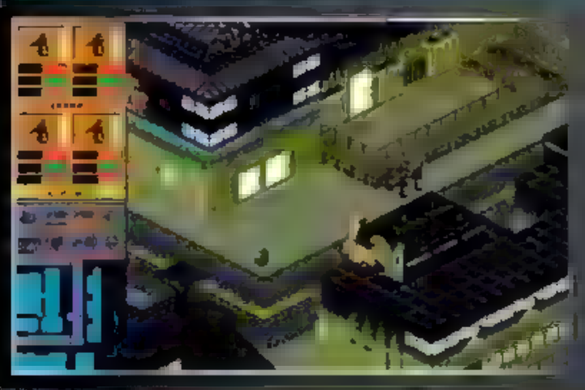


QUADRILATERAL COWBOY

If you're looking for a game that lets you play the role of hacker, we heartily recommend the fantastic *Quadrilateral Cowboy*. You infiltrate bizarre dystopic spaces that hint at the nature of the world around you, using your laptop to hack security systems and control cool gadgets like a miniature robot and a rifle that you carry around in a suitcase.

NEUROMANCER

We had to include the videogame adaptation of the most influential cyberpunk novel. The videogame version of *Neuromancer* is a treat for fans who get to interact with familiar characters and explore locations from the book. It also does a good job of mixing two key aspects of cyberpunk: rough urban streets and the digital territory of cyberspace.

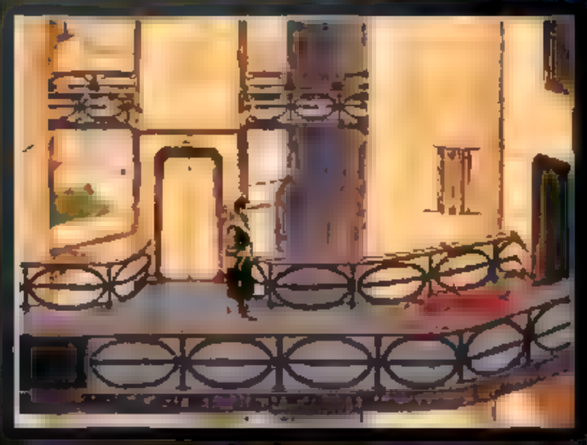


SYNDICATE

Set in a world where megacorps have taken control of the world and citizens have had a device inserted in their neck that numbs them to the terrible conditions they are forced to live in, *Syndicate* is a brilliant example of the genre's cynical take on capitalist power. Give it a try and find out why it is a fondly remembered cult classic among strategy fans.

BENEATH A STEEL SKY

There are so many great cyberpunk adventures to choose from, but this effort from Revolution Software remains one of the best. Given that the studio recently announced that it is making a sequel called *Beyond A Steel Sky*, now is a good time to get acquainted with the story of Robert Foster and his first encounter with the dystopic Union City.



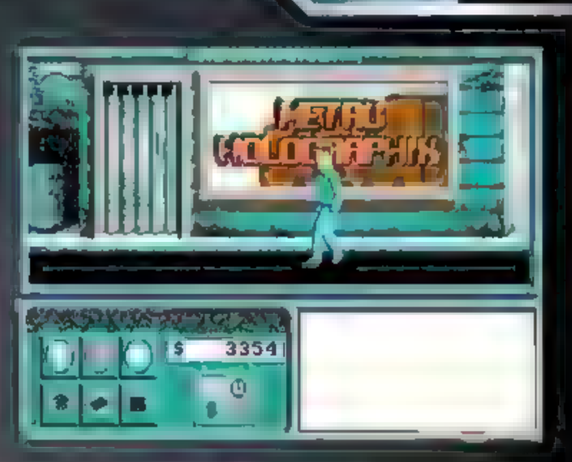
BRUCE BALFOUR

The game designer reveals the odd story behind the videogame adaptation of William Gibson's Neuromancer

"The game was developed as the result of relationship networks. It was an odd mixture of Hollywood connections centred on Timothy Leary (former Harvard psychologist and LSD evangelist), plastic surgery money from New York and game publisher Electronic Arts.

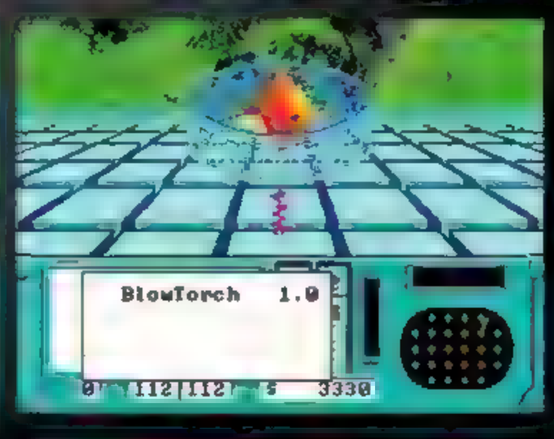
"Cabana Boy Productions paid Gibson $100,000 to acquire the film and electronic media rights. And where did that money come from? Unfortunately, Cabana Boy Productions had never made a film before, and they actually were two guys who served drinks by the pool at the Beverly Hills Hotel. While they were serving drinks, they met Deborah Rosenberg, the wife of a successful New York plastic surgeon, and she managed to get her husband to write Gibson the big check for the film (and game) rights. Around this same time, Tim Leary read *Neuromancer* and thought it was amazing. He contacted Gibson, and then got in touch with Cabana Boy about making a game out of it.

"Tim Leary had created one strange game product for Electronic Arts, *Mind Mirror*, which was released in 1986. When Leary went back to Electronic Arts with his pitch for a *Neuromancer* game... they weren't interested. When Electronic Arts (and Activision) passed on Leary's game concept, a producer at EA introduced him to Brian Fargo at Interplay. When Leary and his wife drove down to the Interplay offices in Newport Beach, California, for a visit, Fargo quickly figured out that Leary was a smart guy but didn't have a technical understanding of computers, software or game development. However, Fargo was interested in *Neuromancer*, so he asked Mike Stackpole, who was living in Phoenix, Arizona, at the time, to put some game design and mechanics together while he was also working on *Bard's Tale III*, as I recall. Mike worked on it but was overloaded, and I had just finished a quick job writing the tutorial



and text for *Battle Chess* when I was brought in for more design, writing and moving things along. Conveniently, I lived near Interplay and was also a published science fiction writer. Troy Miles did all the hard work of coding in assembly language for the 6502 processor to beat the C64 into submission and make it perform clever tricks, and he was great to work with. And this was the crew that went up to visit Tim Leary at his house in Bel Air.

"Fargo drove us through the Westwood/Beverly Hills area and on up into Bel Air, where the roads wind around big estates packed in on the sides of the Hollywood Hills. I wasn't expecting Leary to be living among the celebrities and power brokers of Hollywood just up the road from Barbra Streisand's house. His wife, Barbara Chase, let us in and had us wait in the living room while Leary finished his quiet time watching the golden sunset reflecting off the buildings in West Hollywood. He had a lot of interesting ideas and artwork to show us (on his Amiga), but we had to keep going back to the practicalities of limited computer memory, disk swapping, gameplay and other technical considerations. In the end, Leary dropped back into a consulting role and I think the last contribution he made was to call Fargo in the middle of the night to tell him Devo wanted to meet with us. Leary was a great networker, and his enthusiasm could get meetings."



altering, persuading or even tricking people into getting what you want. The spin comes when the game clashes individual versus corporate responsibilities: the main characters are manipulating individuals to keep a big company from manipulating many more individuals. Does the scale justify or condemn the means?"

Jordi argues that cyberpunk need not necessarily ape the conventions established in the early days of the genre, a perspective backed up by Supergiant creative director Greg Kasavin and showcased in his studio's beautiful action RPG that blends real-time combat with a pause mechanic, *Transistor*.

"A lot of cyberpunk fiction is very grounded in the *Neuromancer*-by-William-Gibson take on the subgenre," Greg says. "I love that take, and it can yield wildly varied results, from *Johnny Mnemonic* to *Deus Ex*. I do think cyberpunk has a great deal of latitude, though. I also think the greatest works of science fiction tend to reflect the present. It's not about rendering a nostalgic past or predicting the future. Cyberpunk has a limitless future. There can always be a new strain of cyberpunk that reflects the current state of the changing times.

"Jen, our art director, took a great deal of inspiration from Art Nouveau, artists such as Alphonse Mucha and Gustav Klimt, whose distinctive style helped shape our romanticised retrofuturistic city of Cloudbank," says Greg reflecting on how the genre's flexibility manifests in *Transistor*. "Aesthetically and tonally, the movie *Dark City* came up in our early discussions quite a bit, thinking about the scene where Jennifer Connelly's character is first introduced, singing a soulful song in a night club.

"From a narrative standpoint, I was really interested in exploring this question of what it means to have a voice in society," Greg continues. "So we have Red, this singer whose voice has been taken from her – she is all action, now. And we have the voice in the Transistor [the sword you wield in the game], whose body has been taken from him – he is all talk, now. They are literally inseparable in the game, and I think there are

RPG *Transistor* has a mechanic which allows you to pause combat and program a series of moves.

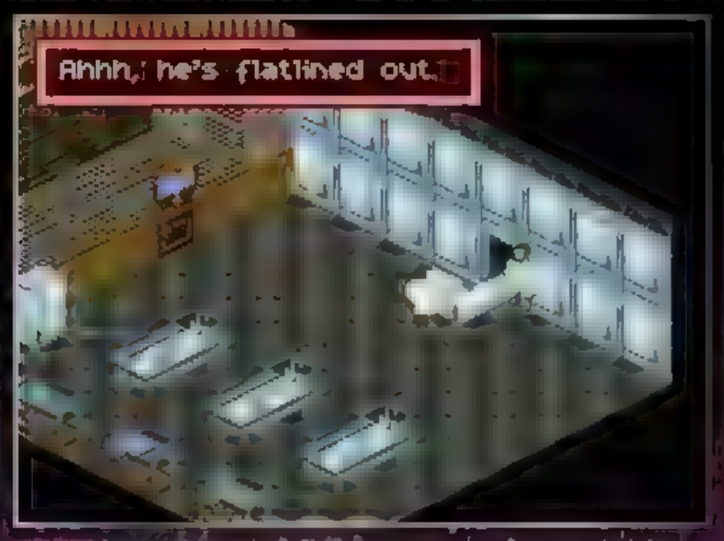
moments throughout where you're confronted with this in the play experience."

Of course, there's been plenty of cyberpunk to offer action alongside storytelling. The uneven *SiN* broke new ground in 1998 with impressive levels of interactivity, 2001 gave us legendary rail shooter *Rez*, which took its cues from the cyberspace visuals envisioned by *Neuromancer*, Ion Storm's cult turn-based RPG *Anachronox* and Bungie's *Oni*, which was influenced by Japanese cyberpunk classics like *Ghost In The Shell* and *Akira*. More recently, Dontnod's 2013 *Remember Me* mixed third-person action with some cool memory remixing, 2017's *Ruiner* delved into the grime of cyberpunk to deliver brutally violent cyberpunk action, followed by the similarly fast-paced but far more colourful neon action platformer *Katana Zero* in 2019.

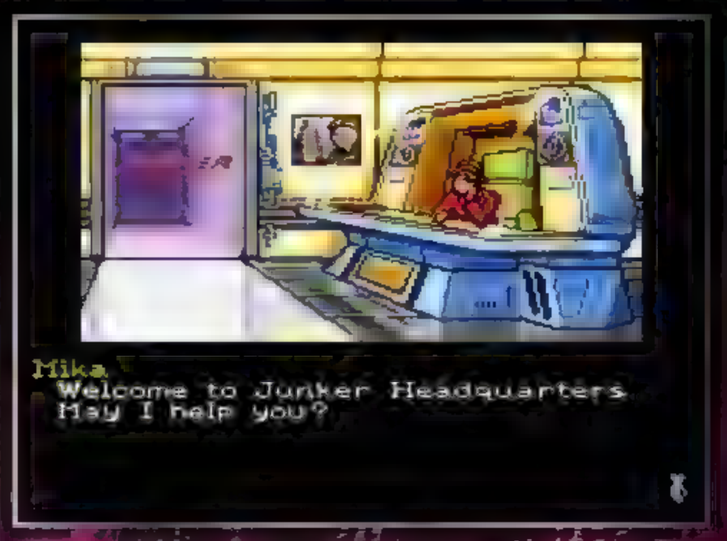
Greg directs us to another key strain of cyberpunk as he tells us about his own favourites. "The one that jumps to mind straight away is *Syndicate*," he explains. "You played as cybernetically enhanced corporate enforcers that violently asserted your employer's will. It was a game fully in that gritty, dark, dystopian pocket of cyberpunk fiction. The harshness of the world, the way it made life feel so utterly disposable, the way it converted everything into a cost-benefit analysis and a financial trade-off... it all made for a really great game."

That iconic game, followed by *Syndicate Wars* in 1996 and 2015 spiritual successor *Satellite Reign*, is a standout in the strategy genre and an unabashed cyberpunk game thanks to the aforementioned focused on brutal corporate rule and cybernetic enhancement.

Another important long-running cyberpunk strategy series takes a slightly different approach. *Shadowrun* has been mixing fantasy and cyberpunk since it was first adapted from tabletops to the SNES in 1993. It was quickly followed up with releases on the Mega Drive and Mega-CD and, more recently, was revived in the form of *Shadowrun Returns* in 2013, *Dragonfall* in 2014 and *Hong Kong* in 2015. The games are tactical turn-based RPGs that blend skills based on magic and cybernetic enhancements.



[SNES] Cult series *Shadowrun* was originally a tabletop game before making the transition to the SNES.



[PS1] Kojima's take on cyberpunk in *Snatcher* takes a genre heavily influenced by Japanese architecture and culture and reflects it back at us.

"I think *Shadowrun* remains relevant because the themes of *Shadowrun* still resonate," highlights Jordan Weisman, CEO of Harebrained Studios, which is behind the series' recent return, on *Shadowrun*'s enduring appeal. "Corporate greed, the banality of evil, the dehumanisation of the 'other' technology's erosion of humanity – all of it is absolutely relevant today. When we conceived of the game setting in 1988, we grounded it in the real world to inspire players to create stories about real people struggling with real issues," Jordan explains. "When we returned to the *Shadowrun* universe to create *Shadowrun Returns*, *Dragonfall* and *Hong Kong* we wanted to touch on those same themes and explore them in new ways."

> **"I think Shadowrun remains relevant because the themes of Shadowrun still resonate"**
> JORDAN WEISMAN

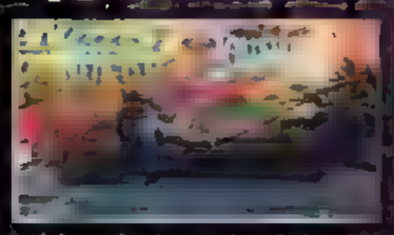
Shadowrun is one of the many cyberpunk titles that have used the fictional idea of cybernetic enhancements as a hook on to which to hang their gameplay and story. This brings to another clutch of cyberpunk classics. *The System Shock* and *Deus Ex* series are a great example of games where the idea of cybernetic enhancement has been used to give the player a coherent fictional justification for shaping a character in the directions they find most interesting and give them the opportunity to respond to gameplay challenges in different ways. *Deus Ex* in particular goes all-in on classic cyberpunk themes and aesthetics: rogue AI, sunglasses at night, the implications of artificial human enhancement, megacorporations, hacking, rampant class inequality and conspiracy theories. Not only are they fantastic games thanks to the way they respond to and respect player choice; their richly drawn locales that include Prague, Hong Kong, New York are fantastic expressions of a cyberpunk future.

In regards to cyberpunk's future, it's hard to look beyond the next title from CD Projekt Red, the studio behind the critically acclaimed *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*. *Cyberpunk 2077*, its videogame continuation of the tabletop game *Cyberpunk 2020* is set to release next year. It appears to have everything we'd want from a cyberpunk title in terms of its aesthetics and systems – hacking, cybernetic enhancements, and so on. This looks like it will produce a stunning dystopic city to explore. If that's combined with a sophisticated exploration of the genre's themes of power, technology and humanity, then cyberpunk fans among us are going to be very happy indeed.

THE FUTURE ACCORDING TO CYBERPUNK

2019

The Blade Runners get busy as Rick Deckard tracks down some rogue Nexus-6 replicants, while, at the same time, Roy McCoy is sent to search for a group of replicants who have been murdering animals – a serious crime in a world where most species are extinct.



2021

The Fourth Corporate War takes place in Night City, during which revolutionary rocker Johnny Silverhand is killed in a blaze of glory. However, Johnny is back in *Cyberpunk 2077*, returning as a digital ghost who looks a lot like Keanu Reeves.

2022

The RT600 android, otherwise known as Chloe (not pictured), becomes the first android to pass the Turing Test and is subsequently mass produced for sale by creator CyberLife. More androids are created, leading to the events of *Detroit: Become Human*.

2027

The 'Aug Incident' occurs in the *Deus Ex* series, causing augmented individuals to lose control of their actions. This results in a crackdown on the rights of people who benefit from the use of augmentations in their bodies.

2071

The AI SHODAN is installed in Citadel Station to take control of security and operations. Putting an advanced AI in control is seen as a brilliant idea from those involved and doesn't lead to any complications whatsoever, as the *System Shock* series tells us.

RGT

Retro Gamer Travels

LOST IN TRANSLATION

How the rest of the world experienced your favourite games

» [Mega Drive] Ristar and his enemies are mostly pretty cute in their original Japanese forms.

RISTAR: THE SHOOTING STAR JPN → ROW

FORMAT
Mega Drive

DEVELOPER
Sega

YEAR
1995

ORIGIN
Japan

LOCALISED FOR
Rest Of World

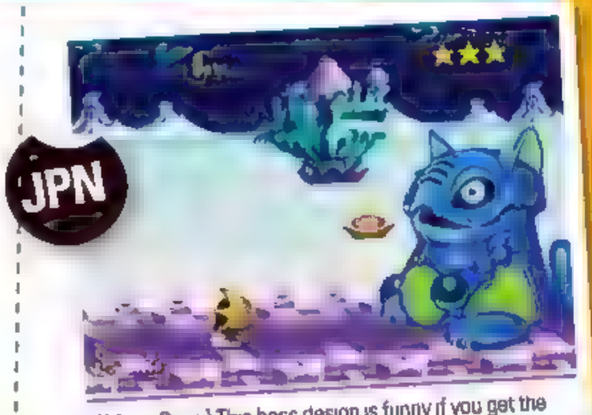
REASONS
Commercial, Difficulty

Judging by some of the changes we've seen made to games over the years, we wouldn't be surprised if there was some game localisation academy that had 'cute is wrong' as a slogan. American *Kirby* games are infamous for depicting the pink puffball with angry eyes, and *Ristar* suffered a similar treatment after leaving Japan. The star-shaped hero gained a stern expression, as did most of the enemies he faces. But that wasn't the only change to the international releases. The biggest, most noticeable sprite change is the alteration of the boss Itamor. In the Japanese version, it's a cat that you defeat with hot food. That seems bizarre until you learn that the Japanese expression term nekojita ('cat tongue') refers to someone who doesn't like hot food. With the cultural connotations lost, the localisation team wisely chose to emphasise an icy appearance for the sprite instead.

The game's plot was changed for the international version, with the Japanese version's star goddess replaced by Ristar's dad, a legendary hero. This resulted in the removal of the star goddess from the intro, and the addition of some expository text. The ending scene was also changed – the Japanese game showed a defeated Greedy, while we got Ristar's reunion with his dad.

The game was broadly made harder, too. Cheat codes for infinite lives and invincibility were removed and the number of continues given was reduced, although Ristar does start with more health in the game's hard mode. To round off the changes, there were some text tweaks and general polishing, including the addition of a skiing scene in the fifth stage and some graphics to explain antigravity swimming in the sixth. How much all of this helped the game's fortunes is up for debate, of course – despite a collection of solid reviews from the gaming press and heavy promotion that positioned Ristar as the next Sonic, the game didn't exactly set the charts on fire back when it debuted in 1995.

» [Mega Drive] Everyone suddenly gets a case of angry brows in the international release of the game.



» [Mega Drive] This boss design is funny if you get the pun, but it's not a common expression outside of Japan.

» [Mega Drive] By emphasising the ice aspect of the character design, the localisation team made the fight make sense

STREET FIGHTER II

JPN → ROW

FORMAT
Arcade

DEVELOPER
Capcom

YEAR
1991

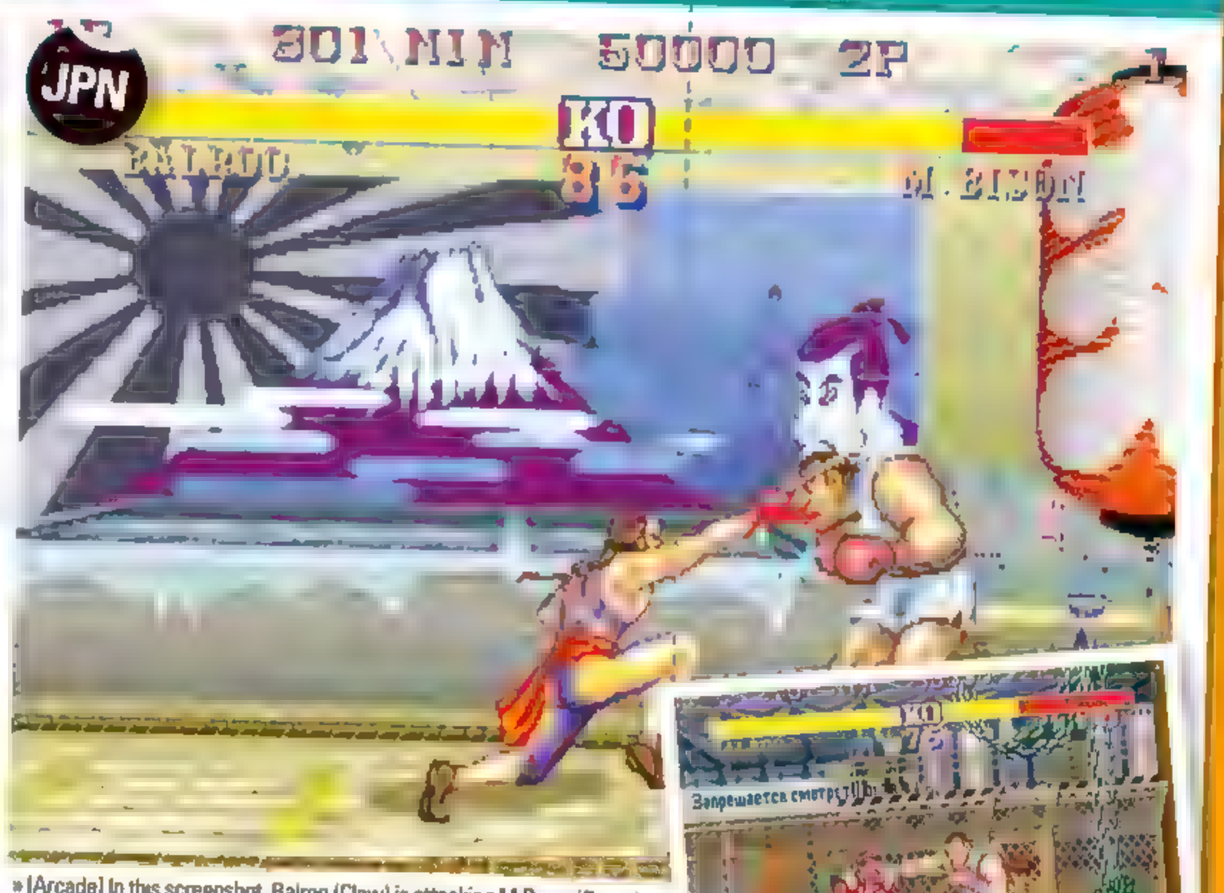
ORIGIN
Japan

LOCALISED FOR
Rest Of World

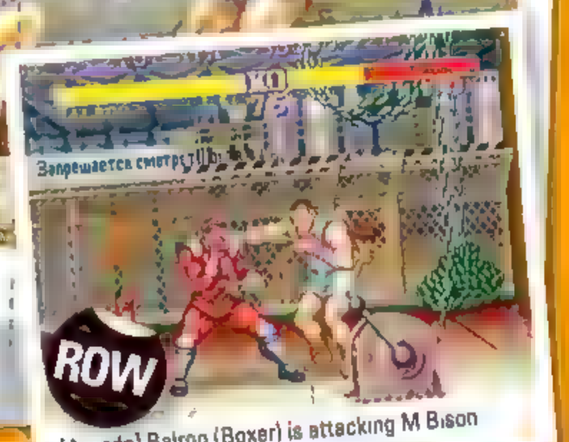
REASONS
Commercial

So here's one you probably know about, but it's worth bringing up again because of recent events. The original Japanese version of *Street Fighter II* had four bosses – Sagat from the original game, a boxer named M Bison, a claw-wielding fighter named Balrog and a man in military dress named Vega. Of course M Bison looked rather like boxing superstar Mike Tyson, and with the boxer's fame – not to mention existing videogame licensing deals – it's easy to see the potential for legal issues. Capcom rotated the names for the American release, leaving us with the Balrog, Vega and M Bison we know today. In the fighting game scene, some prefer to use Boxer, Claw and Dictator to avoid ambiguity when discussing characters.

The ruse appears to have worked, as Mike Tyson doesn't seem to have been aware of the homage until very recently. He was definitely informed of it during a podcast discussion in April 2019, and during a TV interview in June 2019, ESPN presenter and retro game fanatic Arda Ocal explained the story to the former world champion and showed him sprites from the game. Upon seeing them, Tyson he said he was "very honoured" by the homage.



» [Arcade] In this screenshot, Balrog (Claw) is attacking M Bison (Boxer)



» [Arcade] Balrog (Boxer) is attacking M Bison (Dictator) here, too. Thanks a lot, Capcom.

ECONOMY

SUPER MARIO: YOSHI'S ISLAND

JPN → GER

FORMAT
SNES

DEVELOPER
Nintendo

YEAR
1995

ORIGIN
Japan

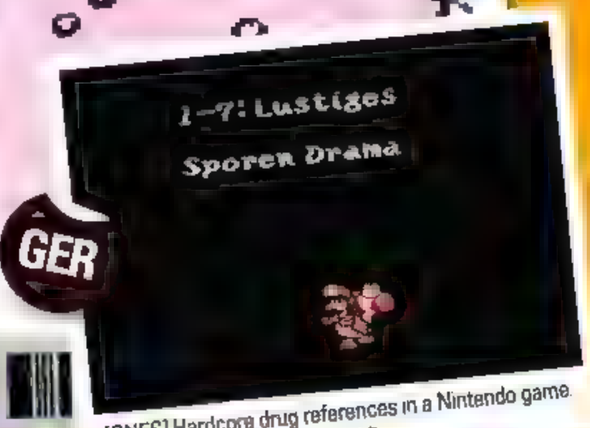
LOCALISED FOR
Germany

REASONS
Drugs

Towards the middle of the Nineties, Nintendo was beginning to liberalise its attitudes towards adult-oriented content in videogames. Having previously enforced a somewhat puritanical policy due to its young target market, the introduction of age rating systems helped it to justify this move – and competition from Sega, with its more relaxed policies, necessitated it. While Nintendo wasn't exactly leaping to embrace sex, drugs and violence, allowing third parties to release games like *Mortal Kombat II* onto its consoles without massive cuts was a move welcomed by players.

Having said all of that, it's not hard to see how audiences could interpret a certain psychedelic stage in *Yoshi's Island* as being somehow linked to drugs. The English name of the stage, 'Touch Fuzzy, Get Dizzy' is a fairly straightforward translation of the Japanese name, Sawaru To Furafura Watabo ('Touch Fuzzy And Stagger'). In Germany, however, the name was translated as Lustiges Sporen Drama ('Funny Spore Drama') – which doesn't seem too bad, until you look at the initials. Liberalisation is one thing, but how often do you see a Nintendo game directly *adding* references to illegal narcotics like LSD?

» [SNES] It's a bit trippy, but you can get away with that in a fantasy world.



» [SNES] Hardcore drug references in a Nintendo game. What's next, Pac-Man on crack?

ECONOMY

THE NINJA SAVIORS

RETURN OF THE WARRIORS

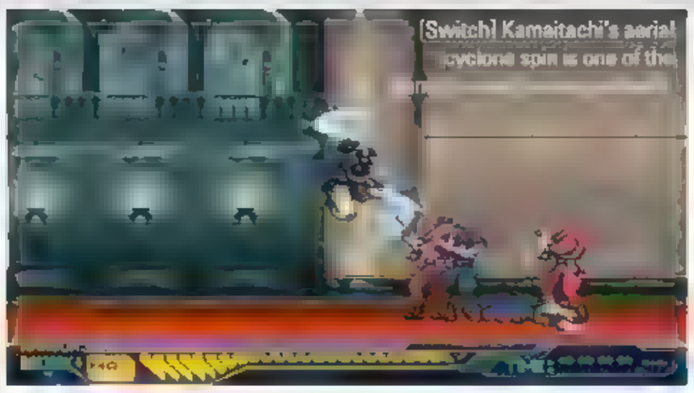
IT'S RARE TO SEE THE RETURN OF A RETRO GAME THAT DIDN'T SELL BRILLIANTLY WELL THE FIRST TIME AROUND – AND IT'S RARER STILL TO SEE THE ORIGINAL DEVELOPERS LEADING THE EFFORT TO BRING IT BACK. WE TALK TO TENGO PROJECT ABOUT ITS REVIVAL OF A CULT SNES FAVOURITE

Words by Nick Thorpe

When you take a look at some of the games that have graced our screens in recent years, it seems as though we're currently experiencing a golden age of videogame remakes and remasters. The chance to play an old favourite on a modern system is always exciting, but some developers have made an art of going above and beyond, by adding new features to classic games or even remaking them outright. Certain developers probably immediately came to mind when we said that, but Tengo Project probably wasn't one of them. If there's any justice, it will be in the future, as *The Ninja Saviors* is as good a remake as we've seen in recent times.

Tengo Project is a team of veteran developers from Natsume Atari, whose first retro project was 2016's *Wild Guns Reloaded*. "We had no plans to remake any other games than *Wild Guns Reloaded*, but the feedback we received for that game was awesome so we started to work on a second remake and we chose *The Ninja Warriors Again*," says Tengo Project, responding as a collective. As with *Wild Guns*, the Tengo Project team all worked on the original SNES game, which was renowned for offering fast, responsive combat, a variety of characters with interesting moves and excellent graphics. "We did not make the game as part of a commission at that time, we made the game and then we asked Taito to publish that."

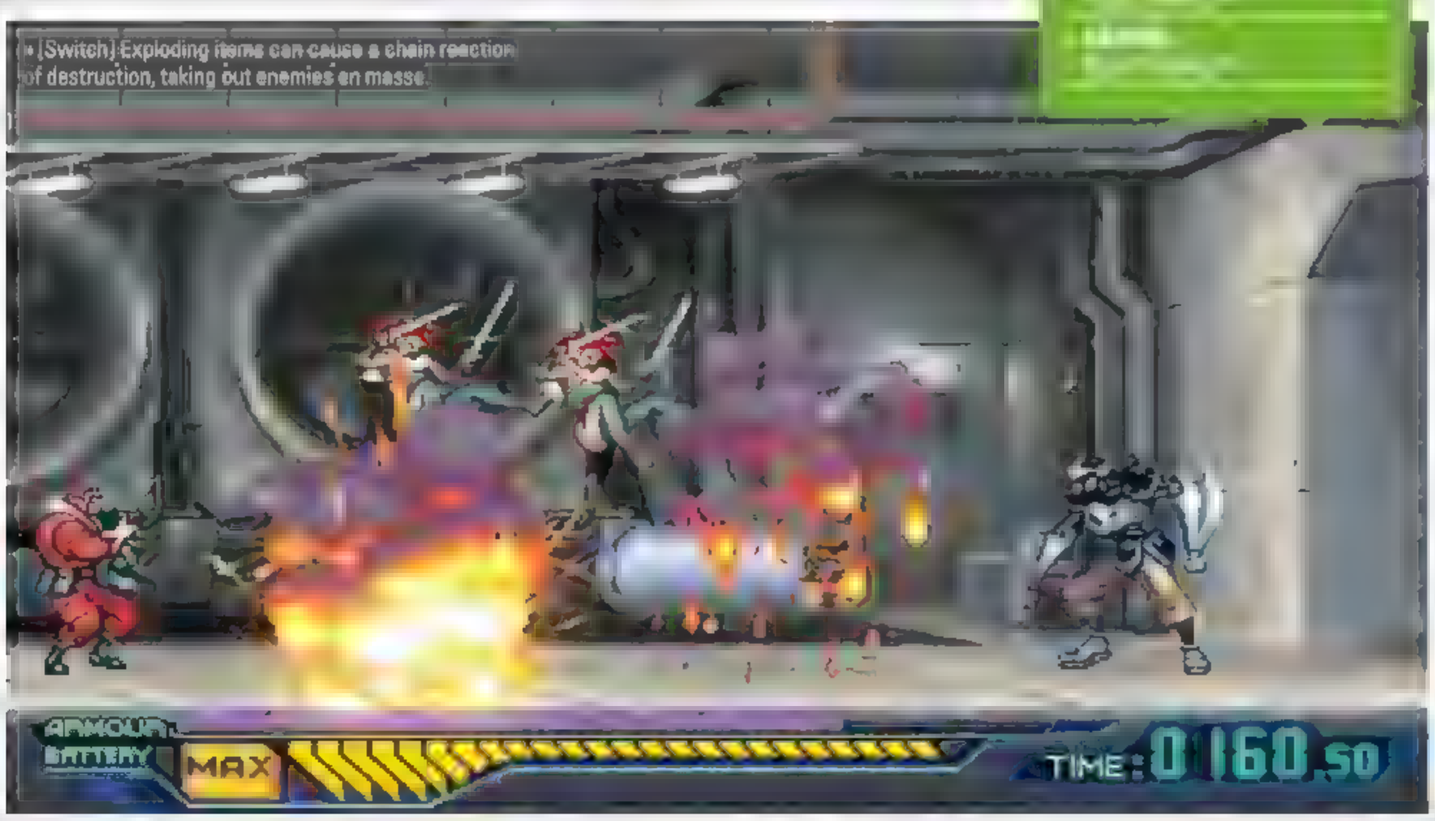
For Taito, the decision was an easy one. "When Taito released consumer software for the first time in nine years, there was no objection within the company and it was immediately



decided to make the first product *Darius Cozmic Collection*," said a company representative. "When we were considering what to do next, Natsume Atari told us about the plan of their remake of the Super Nintendo version of *The Ninja Warriors Again*, and we thought that both, the quality of the original and the achievements of the staff were more than convincing to start the project. In addition to redrawing the entire graphics and adding new characters with a completely different operability, the game feels like it has been turned into a remake that offers fresh fun while the fans of the original game feel immediately familiar."

Like *Wild Guns*, *The Ninja Warriors Again* is a SNES cult classic, one which sells for a high price on the secondary market. This is something that the team is aware of, though it's a fact that they seem somewhat baffled by. "The three members of Tengo Project still have copies," we're told. "The price has increased quite a lot, but it feels a bit strange as the game did not sell that well back then." Of course, that scarcity is exactly the reason that the game commands such a high price today, as it was only later that players

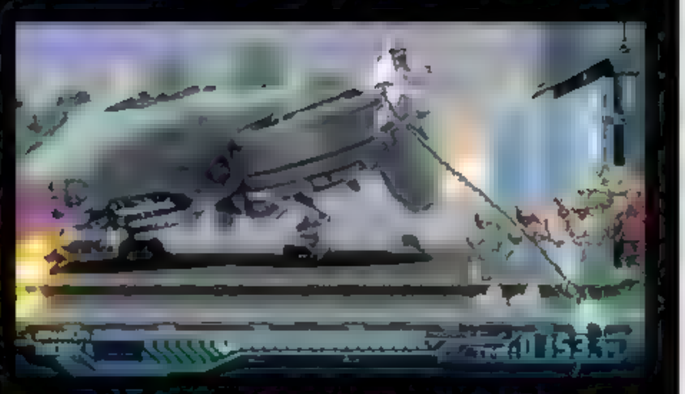
"THE THREE MEMBERS OF TENGO PROJECT STILL HAVE COPIES. THE PRICE HAS INCREASED A LOT, BUT IT FEELS A BIT STRANGE AS THE GAME DID NOT SELL THAT WELL BACK THEN"



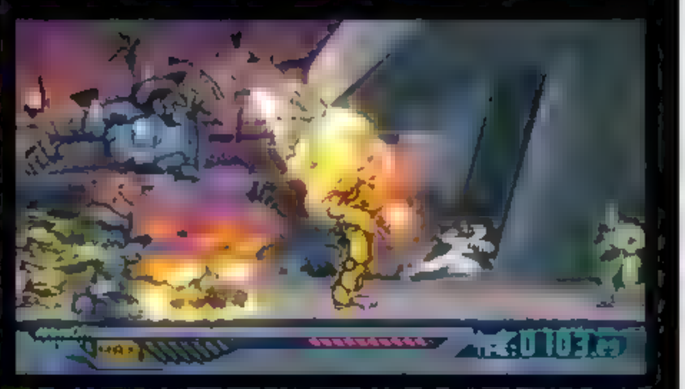
New Faces

Just who are Yaksha and Raiden?

Just as it did with *Wild Guns Reloaded*, Tengo Project has included two new playable characters in *Ninja Saviors* – however, this time they're not available from the start, and instead must be unlocked for play.



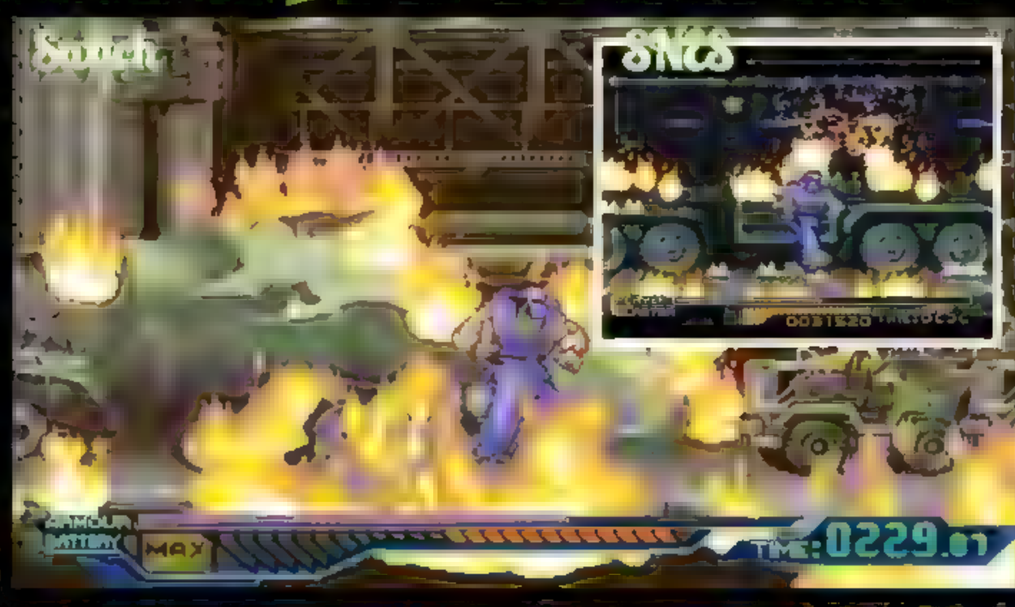
Yaksha is likely the first character that you'll unlock, as you can get her after beating the game once on normal difficulty. At first, she seems to be a bit of a damp squib, as she's relatively slow and doesn't feel too dynamic. However, all of that changes once her special abilities come out to play. She's great at aerial combos, and can use her extending arms to attack enemies from high above, as well as the more obvious grappling uses. It's a playstyle that's well suited for experts who are bored with the more conventional characters.



Raiden is unlocked once you've beaten the game on hard difficulty, which is no mean feat. As the dev team mentioned in the main feature, he's rather akin to a boss character – while beat-'em-ups often feature big bruisers like *Final Fight*'s Mike Haggar or *Streets Of Rage 2*'s Max Hatchett, Raiden's enormous size and crushing power are rather out of the ordinary. His huge size makes him an easy target, and he's not an agile chap – he can barely jump with the aid of wrist-mounted rocket boosters. However, he can assume an ED-209-style mech tank form that makes him faster, allows him to shoot grenades and gives him huge boosted jumps.

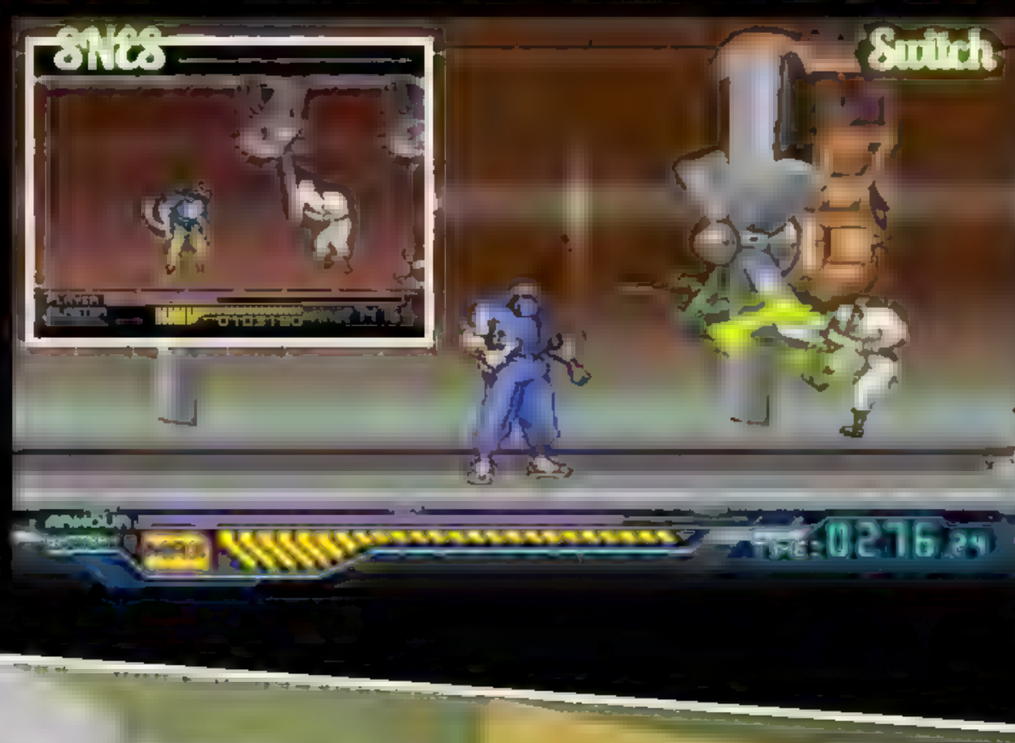
Glow Up

Take a look at just how heavily The Ninja Saviors revamps the original graphics

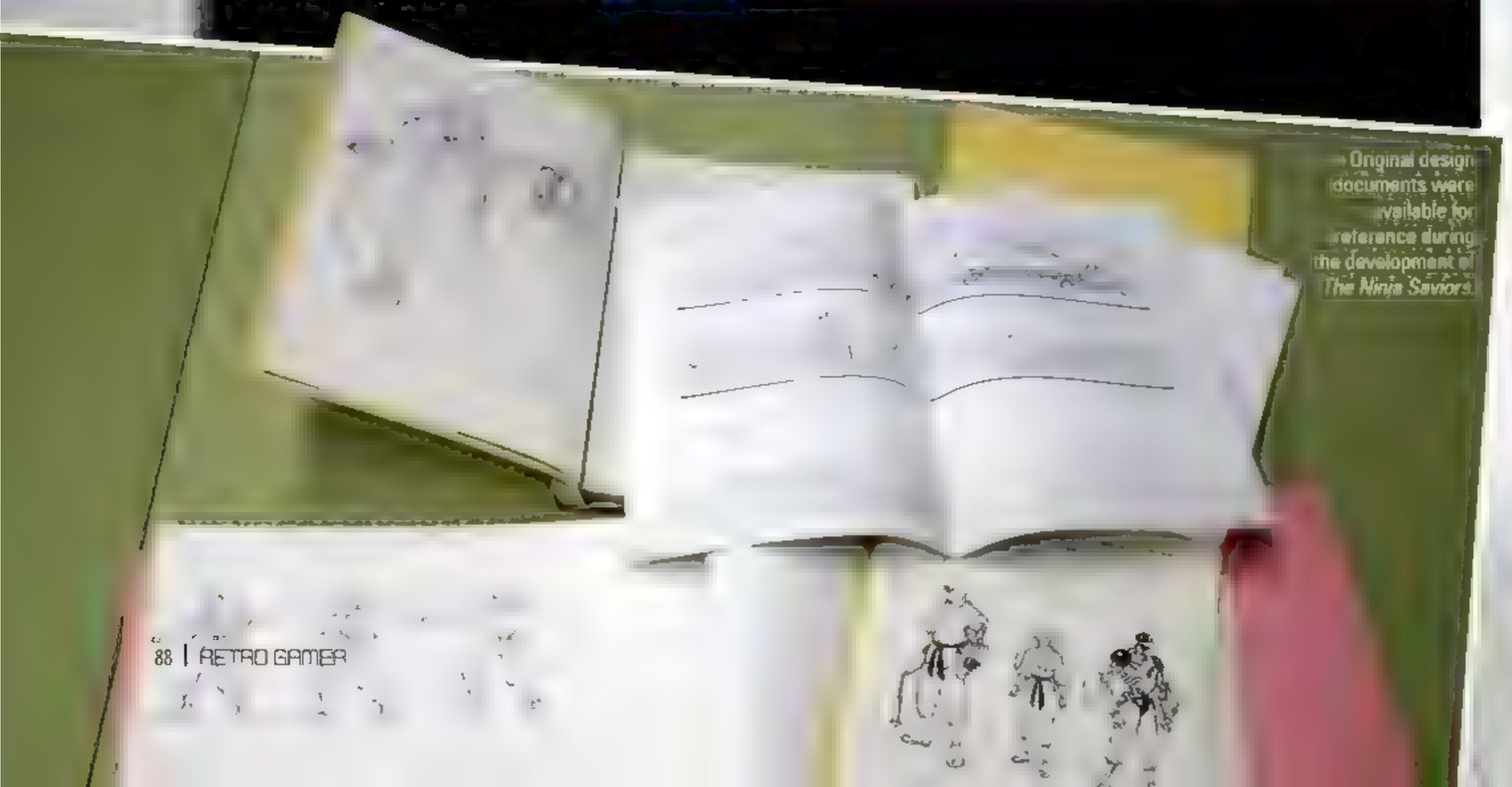


■ The larger, more detailed and more prominent flame graphics draw focus in this scene, but the vastly improved backdrop showing a military installation and missiles is noteworthy too. Rather than just losing its top half, the destroyed truck now shows metal that has peeled backwards as the explosion has ripped it to shreds.

■ The metallic shading on the train has been improved to be less uniform, with more intricate representations of broken glass in the windows. The pillar on the right and the floor show more signs of decay and battle scarring in the new game, and the station background now gives a decent impression of a larger space.



■ The tunnel here has more colour and a greater sense of light, but the cables running along the side have reduced in number and been shifted upwards a little bit. The industrial fans have been increased in size, making it clear that you can't crawl under them, and enemies have a new green 'blood' effect when they're defeated.



■ Original design documents were available for reference during the development of *The Ninja Saviors*.

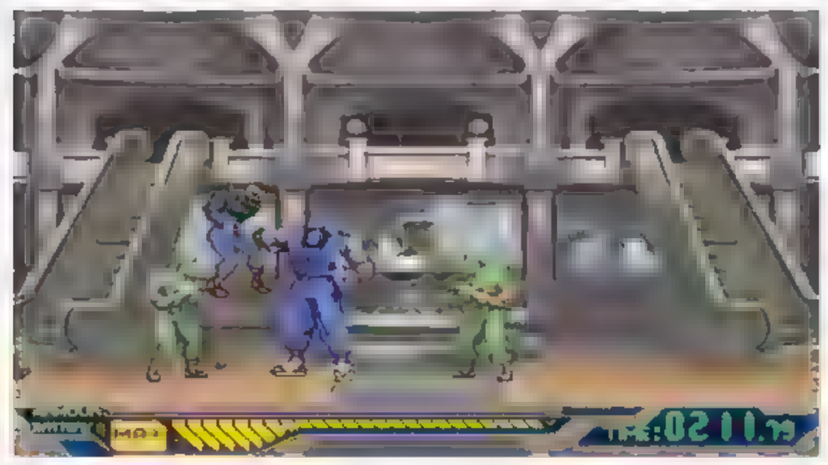
realised what they had missed out on. Of course, those aren't the only things from the past that the Tengo Project team has access to. "Besides the original game box itself, we still have original art and development materials. Mr Taniguchi, who drew all the original art, is also in charge of the package design of the new version."

The scope of the project ensured that the options most commonly used for retro releases were out of the question.

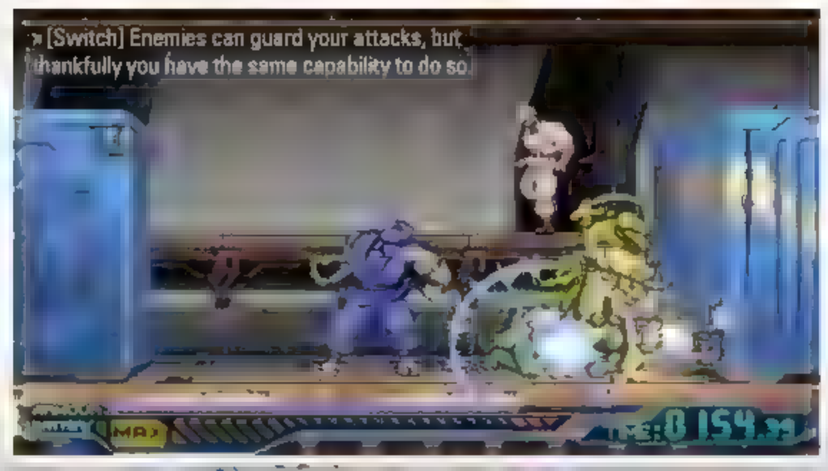
"If you plan to work again on an old title, there are three options: emulators, porting the source code, or you closely look at the game and copy it," the Tengo Project team tells us. "For this game we had to add widescreen support and new characters, so we had to go with the third option. In this third case it is very difficult to reproduce everything completely. So even though it is not possible to create an identical copy of the game, we wanted the fans of the series to get the same good feeling they had when they played the game back in the days, so we paid attention to even the smallest details." The result is a game that is more of a remake than a straight conversion.

When you first play the game, the most striking difference is the graphics. "While sticking to the original feeling we also had to optimise the old graphics and add new effects, this was a big challenge. The graphic format of those days could not be used with modern hardware," the team tells us. "As a result, we decided to use the game engine Unity – but it was quite time-consuming to reproduce all the graphics, sprite data and screen data of the original game in Unity. Once we had finished this process, we started to enhance everything (such as the size of the sprites, or patterns which the SNES hardware was not capable of handling)."

As a result, you'll still fight the same sorts of enemies and bosses, and you'll walk through the same kinds of stages that you did in the SNES



[Switch] Ninja's grab has been subtly altered, as he's now capable of walking with an enemy in hand.



■ [Switch] Enemies can guard your attacks, but thankfully you have the same capability to do so.

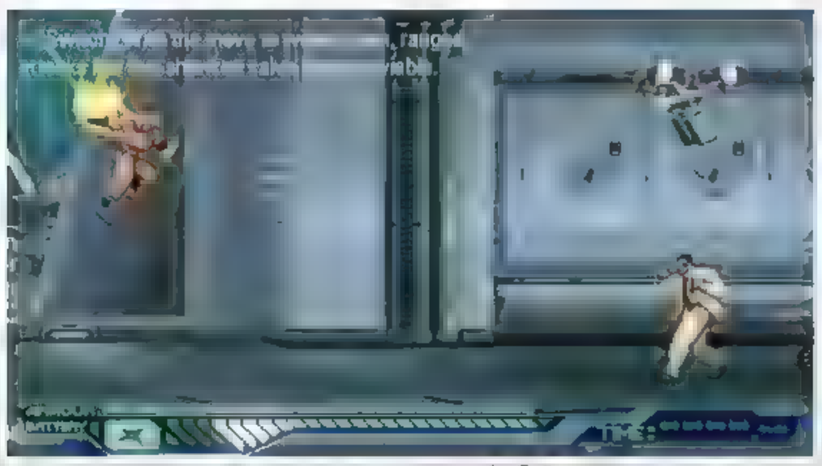
game. However, everything has been beefed up – enemies can be bigger and more imposing, and additional detail is visible everywhere. Particular attention was paid to the game's eight stages. "We did our best to overhaul the environments – adding more life to the backgrounds such as robots, biotechnology products and living humans. Creating new data that integrated well into the original setting without feeling out of place was more difficult than expected." The results are quite astonishing. The SNES game was a handsome one indeed, but the bump up in quality for the remake gives it a feel closer to a mid-Nineties arcade game, running on hardware like Capcom's CPS2 board. The amount of time it took to create the new visuals is a potent reminder of the fact that pixel art isn't necessarily an easy artistic route for developers to take. "How much time it takes for this depends on the character, since each character has a different size and needs a different amount of move patterns," the team explains. "For example, Kunoichi has an average size and to animate her somersault alone it takes three to four days. The average enemy takes about ten days to animate."

While the graphical update will be obvious to anyone looking at the comparison gallery on these very pages, a surprising amount of work has also been done on overhauling the game design to better fit today's technology. "The hardware capabilities of the original SNES version were quite low, so it was only possible to display four enemies on-screen at once back then. So, when increasing the view, the screen would look quite empty if the players only saw four enemies in such a huge environment," says Tengo Project, explaining the decision to increase the number of enemies you fight. "Furthermore, since the view of the SNES version was quite narrow, the enemies were always very close. But in the remake the horizontal resolution has been increased quite a lot, so the player has to walk towards the enemy to get in reach. So we decided to prepare new moves and weapons to make up for this higher resolution," the team continues. "This gives a new feeling to the game, but we think that these adjustments only help to make the game be even more enjoyable."

"THE HARDWARE CAPABILITIES OF THE ORIGINAL SNES VERSION WERE QUITE LOW, SO IT WAS ONLY POSSIBLE TO DISPLAY FOUR ENEMIES ON-SCREEN AT ONCE BACK THEN"

Tengo Project

[Switch] A rare natural scene – clearly it needs a little bit violence to spice things up.



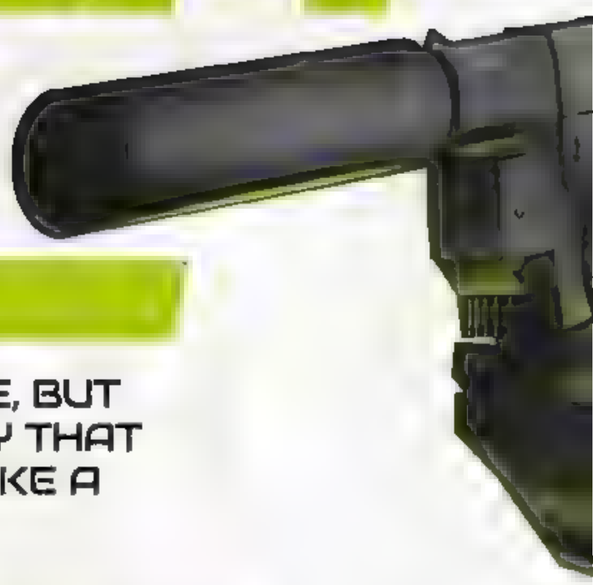
Also incorporated into the design were two additional characters that can be unlocked upon completing the game. "Another challenge was the creation of new characters, Yaksha and Raiden," we're told. "We had to create two characters that fans of the SNES version would be able to feel familiar with, but they also had to add fresh ideas to the game. The development of Raiden alone took as much time as for the other four characters. The existing trio already complemented each other with their characteristics, so with the new characters we had to give them new abilities that completely stand out. Raiden is huge and powerful, so he feels like playing a boss character. When Yaksha goes wild, she does things that could not have been anticipated by the player. With their striking abilities in mind, both characters have been designed to be enjoyed by those who have already mastered the original.

"[Another] challenge was the new co-op mode," the team continues. This is usually an integral part of any beat-'em-up, but where the original game struggled to draw a number of combatants on-screen together, a multiplayer mode wouldn't have made sense. With the power of modern hardware, that's not a problem. "At the start of the project we were really worried whether we could make a co-op mode work, but in the end, we were happy to see that it turned out to be really enjoyable," the Tengo Project team tells us. "We can definitely recommend the fans to play co-op mode together with friends who already have certain experience with the series." Other new inclusions in the game include a Time Attack mode, with stages unlocked as you progress through the game. You'll also find support for online leaderboards, both for Time Attack and for the full game – these are only accessible to those who do things properly, so you'll have to beat the entire game (or stage, in Time Attack) without using continues in order to register a score. You'll also have the option to use the soundtracks of the previous *Ninja Warriors* games, though these must be unlocked by completing the game with Yaksha and Raiden.

When re-releasing old, expensive games, it can be incredibly tempting to leave them as-is. After all, the appeal of getting the game for an affordable price should be incentive enough to drive purchases. But with *Wild Guns Reloaded* and now The *Ninja Saviors*, Tengo Project has established a template that goes beyond those basic expectations. *The Ninja Saviors* is a total revamp from top to bottom, which retains the basic concept and feeling of the SNES original while modernising just about every aspect possible. Show it to a player without the necessary familiarity with the original version, and they'll probably think it *is* the original version – but for those who know it well, there are plenty of reasons to pull the trigger on a purchase all over again.

"In the end, we think that we managed to create a remake in a way that was only possible since we were the original developers of the game," Tengo Project says. They may be right – and if that's the case, we want more original developers to return to their past glories as quickly as possible, because *The Ninja Saviors* is a fine piece of work. ✱

THE MAKING OF Tom Clancy's SPLINTER CELL



SOLID SNAKE MAY WELL HAVE POPULARISED THE STEALTH GENRE, BUT IT WAS SAM FISHER AND HIS THIRD ECHELON GOVERNMENT AGENCY THAT BROUGHT INNOVATION AND MATURITY TO COVERT GAMING. WE TAKE A LOOK AT HOW SPLINTER CELL CAME TO LIGHT

WORDS BY ADAM HOUSLEY

- **PUBLISHER:** UBISOFT
- **DEVELOPER:** UBISOFT MONTREAL
- **RELEASED:** 2002
- **PLATFORM:** VARIOUS
- **GENRE:** TACTICAL ESPIONAGE ACTION

Is there such a thing as a happy accident when it comes to videogame development? Is it possible for developers – who work on their games for years at a time – to simply land butter-side-up without any planning or intention? Different developers would have varied opinions on that, but it's hard to discount the numerous times that classic games have been born from an idea that was heading down a completely different route. *Grand Theft Auto* was famously a game about street racing when a glitch that caused the cops to aggressively ram the player off the road took it down a different path. *Pikmin* started life as a tech demo for the GameCube, with numerous Marios hopping and bounding about the stage that impressed so much, the concept became a game of its own. Even the fighting game genre as we know it spawned from a bug in *Street Fighter II* that allowed players to pull off combo attacks if they were skilled enough. Happy accidents can lead to great things, and in many ways that's the story of *Splinter Cell* – a game that began life as something completely different.

"The game was supposed to be a revolutionary title that was a blend between two types of gameplay," explains François Coulon of how the game originally began development. "You would have a strategy core layer where you would see something from above, like a map [in] *Warcraft II*, and then you could go into any unit and play them in third-person or first-person view." François was the director of *Splinter Cell* at Ubisoft, and one of the few developers that started out on the project at its earliest stage. "We started to work on those two different layers, until we realised that it was way, way, way too complicated to do with the technology that we had at that time." The project shifted focus to just the action adventure style of gameplay, which was attached to a high-level story concept that couldn't be further from the final release. Rather than espionage, covert ops and fighting from the shadows, the game that *Splinter Cell* began life as was considerably more colourful. "We were doing this original IP in an original universe, which was based on the Earth that would have exploded and shattered into small islands. So there was this small island of Paris, small island of Venice, New York, Hong Kong, this kind of thing. It was a bit like in *Avatar*, except that this was back in 1998, 1999, you know?"

[PS2] The opening level has it all: a missing agent, a burning building and corrupt cops. A strong opener for any covert ops storyline.

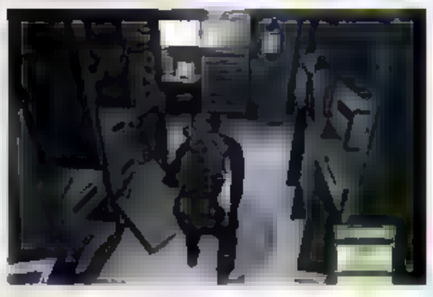
PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 2003

ASSASSIN'S CREED
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 2007

WATCH DOGS 2 (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 2016

» François Coulon was the director of *Splinter Cell* and is now head of production at Microids.

CONVERSION CAPERS



Xbox

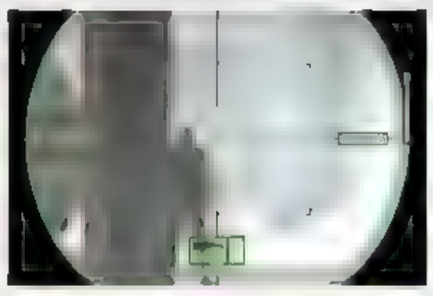
■ As the lead platform for *Splinter Cell*, this was the platform to play the game on when it first launched. Compared to the other consoles, the Xbox version was by far and away the best version, with improvements to graphics fidelity and smoother gameplay. It was the only console version where the cutscenes were played in the game engine rather than with cinematic videos.

PC

■ Since the original Xbox was pretty much a PC in its hardware architecture, there was a lot of similarities between the two. Naturally with the improved hardware available PC was the best version graphically, especially since the use of dynamic lighting was a relatively new tech at the time so the more power available, the more impressive such effects could look.

GameCube

■ The two other console versions were ported over by Ubisoft Shanghai, and as a result there was less attention paid to managing that one-engine experience. The use of cinematic cutscenes were one thing, but both the GameCube and the PlayStation 2 had drastically reduced graphics and even arbitrary changes in the level design - for seemingly no reason.



PlayStation 2

■ While there wasn't much difference between the GameCube and PlayStation 2 versions, it was the latter that was the worst of the console versions. Even using the scope on the rifle had a severely pixelated viewpoint, making it basically impossible to use. There was an additional level - the Nuclear Power Plant - that no other platform had access to, though.

GBA

■ Naturally the 2D perspective of the portable versions was a major difference to its bigger brothers, especially since the light/shadow mechanic that was so impressive in the 3D version just wasn't possible here. Despite that, the GBA version was a solid representation of the stealth antics and could even be connected to the GameCube version to be used as a map of the levels.

N-Gage

■ The taller screen of Nokia's N-Gage mobile phone/console hybrid didn't add too much over the Game Boy Advance version, but it was a very similar experience. It also had multiplayer that could be played over Bluetooth, too, which naturally wasn't too fulfilling a mode considering the hardware, but it at least offered something that none of its other ports had.

BEHIND THE STEALTH

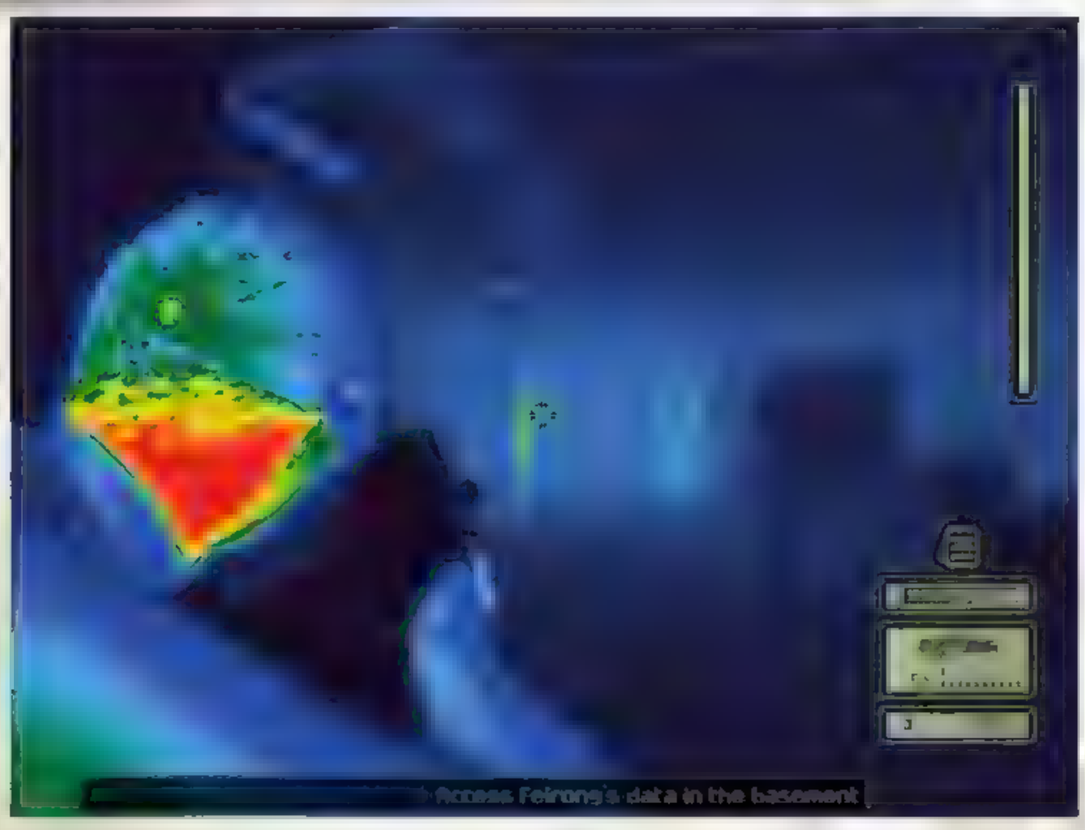
Perhaps the most significant aspect that *Splinter Cell* brought to stealth games wasn't its intriguing storyline or novel gameplay, but the use of dynamic lighting to create realistic light and shadows for Sam Fisher. "The biggest problem – and it's still a problem for stealth games – is that you're not supposed to trigger the alarm, which means you have to do whatever you can to kill the guard before he rings the alarm," explains François. "This is cool, but what happens if you trigger an alarm? It's super frustrating if you do and it's 'boom! Game over'. I could've killed the guy, if people come in I could've fought, I could've hidden."

Though *Splinter Cell*'s missions did have situations where no kills could be made or alarms could be triggered, for François the answer to this sort of 'failing' was to give players the info they needed to succeed next time. That's where the focus on light and shadow came from, and from there further means of communicating that visibility to the player. "It has to be permissive, but it has to be very clear for the player when you are seen and when you're not seen," adds François. "That's why we had this marker, a gauge, telling you how much you're exposed to other people's point of view. That was the tool you needed to understand exactly your position. You need to understand what it is for so you can play better next time."

The project hung around in preproduction for an unusual amount of time, François explains, which at first was a boon because it meant the small team could create prototypes of gameplay ideas for potential gadgets that the player character would use. "We thought we would go into production, except Gerard Guillemot [CEO of Ubisoft] was not really sure simply because at that time it was when the PlayStation 2 and Xbox were being released, and they said it was risky to use an original IP on new consoles, so we should probably apply an existing licence to it." What this meant was a slew of "prototypes, prototypes and more prototypes" as the team waited for the game to get the greenlight. "We never went into production, but all the ideas that we were developing ended up in the other third-person games that were being produced in New York and Montreal, which was *Tarzan* and *Batman*. So we were a bit frustrated because we were doing cool ideas, prototyping them, and then they would end up in other games."

This was how a lot of the unique ideas that were later iconic in *Splinter Cell* came to be formed, the extended preproduction phase giving Ubisoft the opportunity to conceive, develop and finesse novel new gameplay ideas. Because Ubisoft was waiting for a licence to come along, all it could create was "a generic shooter" while the original IP was dropped – ultimately going on to be reformed into an animated series called *Skyland* that was created by the art director of the game. "So we were working on this generic shooter and once in a while the boss of Montreal studio was coming and saying, 'Oh, we've acquired a licence in Ubisoft China or wherever, do you think this licence would be good?'" It wasn't until the company acquired Red Storm Entertainment, which had been created by Tom Clancy and produced *Rainbow Six*, that the project began to become more concrete. François noted that Tom Clancy was "super mass market" thanks to his millions of books sold, films with reputable actors and a theme that was incredibly well suited to gaming. "And so we said, 'Okay, let's do this: it's like *James Bond* without the humour.' And that's how it all started. We did the first prototype, we thought about the stealth thing from the beginning."

The choice to use the *Tom Clancy* licence was a crucial one, since it suddenly switched from a generic shooter – Ubisoft's first 'violent' game, in fact – to what François describes as a "smart shooter" with inspirations primarily from *Metal Gear Solid* but also *Thief* and *Deus Ex* for the freedom of the player in how they could approach each level. "Ubisoft realised that it was going to be a great game, and said: 'This has huge potential, so of course you can go into production, but there are going to be more people and we're going to give you a producer so you can stay focused on the creative side of it,'" reveals



[PC] Perhaps the most notable downgrade from PC and Xbox to PS2 and GameCube is the different goggles – the PC and Xbox versions are far more effective

[PC] The pistol wasn't as powerful and it required more accuracy, but it was also the only weapon that could be used while pressed up against a wall.

» [PS2] Either Sam is such an expert at hacking that he just needs a few seconds to grant himself access to a computer, or military passwords are not as strong as they should be.

"WE WANTED A SEAMLESS EXPERIENCE AND WE WANTED FREEDOM FOR THE PLAYER. IF YOU WANT TO SHIMMY UP THAT BUILDING, YOU CAN DO IT. IF YOU WANT TO GO ON THE STREETS AND BE SEEN, THAT'S A RISK, BUT YOU CAN. YOU CAN DO ANYTHING."

François. The team grew from the original five people, including François, that had been developing the concept from the beginning. "One was a lead designer, Nathan Wolff, and it was it his first game ever. After this he left the industry. He did one game in his life. Ed Byrne was a level designer. David Kelina was on the AI and the JT Petty was the scriptwriter of the game. And for all of those people, this was their first game ever."

Despite the inspirations behind the game, the team still wanted *Splinter Cell* to be very much its own thing. It was going to have stealth like *MGS*, but it wasn't going to have scripted ways of bypassing problems. It was going to have the ability to extinguish lights, like *Thief*, but it was going to be more focused on the AI's understanding of shadow. It was going to have freedom for players like *Deus Ex*, but it was going to be built on a core of action rather than RPG mechanics. "One of the things that we wanted was that we wanted only one engine," says François, "we wanted a seamless experience and we wanted freedom for the player. If you want to shimmy up that building, you can do it. If you want to go on the streets and be seen, that's a risk, but you can. You can do anything. So we didn't want it to be a puzzle with only one solution, this is a toolbox of weapons and skills and gadgets at your disposal, do what you want with it. And that's important because when you look at *Metal Gear Solid*, for instance, when you enter a room the camera is fixed in the corner of the room and there is basically only one way to solve the puzzle. It was important inspiration that we took from these games, but we changed that a bit."

With the *Tom Clancy* licence in tow, all those early prototypes of gadgets and gameplay experimentations really came to fruition. The function for shooting cameras onto walls and being able to see from that perspective had been a concept of the game since the earliest stages, and through the veil of a top-secret government agency it was easy to bring over into the game as a high-tech, special ops gadget. All these tools were intended to add to the flexibility of the game, to provide the player with that 'toolbox' to use as they wish. "I am not the kind of guy who knows exactly the game that he wants and is going to impose it on everyone," explains François. "I don't know the game I want, so I have dialogue with everybody. Which means my role is to make sure that everybody understands the creative vision of the game, what we're going for, what are the main pillars of the gameplay and just to have everyone come up with cool ideas." This was the case during pre-production, but it was also the case when the game was in full development, too, and one of the key reasons that so many novel ideas could make it in. The remote deployable cameras, the nonlethal 'sticky shockers' and the thermal vision goggles were just some of the gadgets that were developed this way, and this often lead to interesting, unexpected ideas for how to use them. "So the coder who came up with how light and shadows are treated in the game – which was pretty innovative at the time – and have the AI react to the shadows, together we came up with some goggles at some point." From there, François explains, someone else had the idea to use these thermal goggles not only to detect enemies but also as a means of finding a way into a building by using the heat from a recent keypad entry to discover the correct code combination. "It was a collective idea," says François

» [PC] The Xbox or PC versions are the ones you'll want to play, since the visual fidelity is so much better. It makes for a much more engrossing story experience, too.

SHOWDOWN

HOW SPLINTER CELL STACKS UP AGAINST METAL GEAR SOLID 2

STEALTH

but for the most part the stealth was largely the same as its predecessor: don't get spotted and, if you do, hide in a locker. *Splinter Cell*'s use of shadow and lighting and its wider range of solutions to any given problem pushes it out ahead of the granddaddy of modern stealth.

STORY

is certainly more memorable than *Splinter Cell*'s, that's not necessarily for the right reasons. The dark, espionage-fuelled storyline of the Third Echelon is captivating for the same reason flat earthers exist, and being at the frontlines of a spy war that no one will ever know about is tantalising.

ACTION

There were moments of forced action in *Splinter*

lved and limited to a handful

oss battles and intense

of weapons at Raiden's disposal, it was entirely plausible to have fun just gunning your way out of a situation.

GADGETS

For as iconic as it is to clad yourself in a

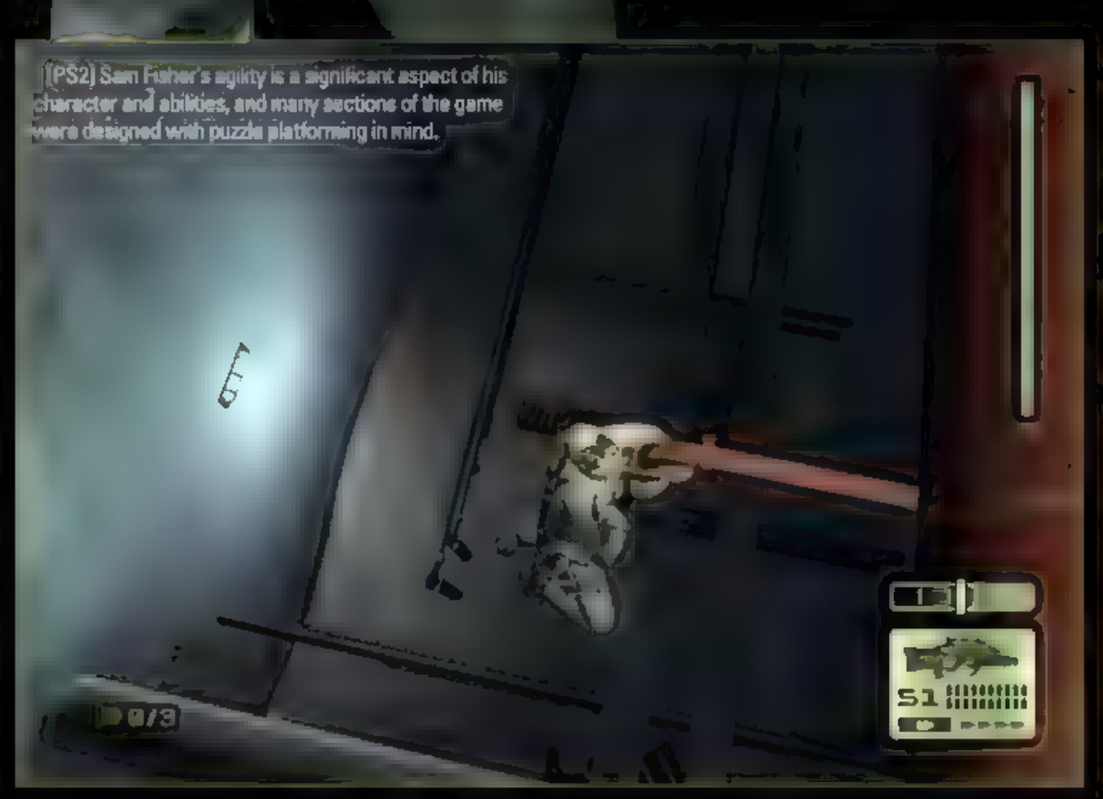
around a guard, the tech

been a mix of real-world

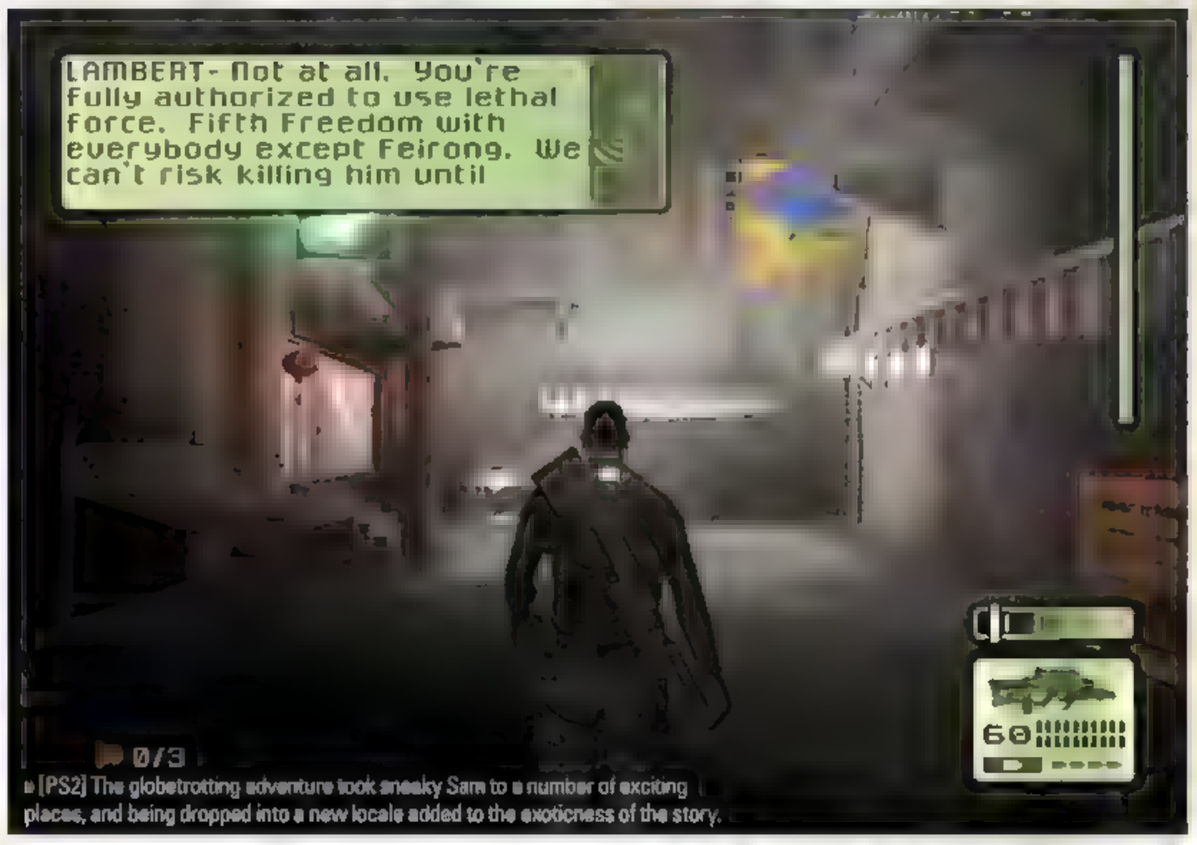
sci-fi fantasy. *Splinter Cell* is not without its own spec ops gadgetry, though, with cameras that can be glued to any surface, sticky shockers to knock guards out nonlethally and sonic mics for collecting info

CHARACTERS

its outlandish characters, and in that sense it should come out on top, thanks to the originality, creativity, and – frankly – strangeness of its cast. But with its more sombre approach, *Splinter Cell* isn't without its beloved names: Michael Ironside's Sam Fisher is a believable grizzled yet light-humoured spy, while Third Echelon colleagues Lambert and Grimsdottir help create the covert mystery.



[PS2] There aren't many images more 'Splinter Cell' than one of a body slung over the shoulders of a hunched Sam Fisher with his iconic goggles in view.



[PS2] The globetrotting adventure took sneaky Sam to a number of exciting places, and being dropped into a new locale added to the exoticness of the story.

of the evolving nature of these goggles. "It's the same thing for the split jump, for instance. The split jump, which is probably the iconic move of Sam Fisher, came from an animator. This is Steve Dupont, and he is a guy I brought to Montreal to work on the game. He's an animator and very talented, and the split jump was his idea." Many of the novel features that were added into the game came from this fluid attitude to development, and perhaps one of the reasons *Splinter Cell* ended up making as big an impact as it did. "It was a joint effort," adds François. "If you put the people in the right understanding of what you're doing, then you're empowering them to be creative. And many of these ideas came about like that."

Yet while these unique gadgets, skills and the clever use of dynamic lighting were undoubtedly key components of what made *Splinter Cell* such an interesting game, when many of us think of *Splinter Cell*, it's typically two things that will come to mind: the three green dots of Sam Fisher's night vision goggles and the Third Echelon story that made the character and his covert operations so compelling. The former was almost "a random accident", suggests François, initially born from the need to create something that could help guide the player to their own whereabouts within the darkened environments of the game. It was the marketing department that saw a strong visual identity here, though, and pushed for those three green dots to make it onto box art, magazine covers and adverts. The story, however, took a little more work. With cinema growing increasingly more fond of darker stories around the turn of the millennium – think *Jason Bourne* to the traditionally more tongue-in-cheek *James Bond* – it was clear that there would be interest for a much more serious tone to *Splinter Cell*. More than that, however, concerns surrounding world politics was also a hot topic, and the *Tom Clancy* licence gave Ubisoft the perfect storm to work on a story that tied all this together. "JT Petty [lead writer] was not super familiar with geopolitical plots," says François, "so I told him how I wanted it to be in terms of the geopolitical story with Russia and China and so on. I also wanted it to be in Myanmar at some point, simply because I went to Burma ten years earlier. I loved that place and I thought it would be exotic but also very interesting. I was also inspired because Burma, at that time, was a Marxist and dictatorial state, so it was interesting for the game." However, development began in earnest in 2001, at which point the story was a little different. "The interesting thing about the story, we started in 1999 and of course it started development in 2001. If you remember it starts with an oil problem in Georgia, except in the game – when we did it – it was Azerbaijan." Because of the events of 9/11, *Splinter Cell* – like so many games at that time – had to respond accordingly. "We had been advised to change, it wasn't clear what would happen from this event and what would go on with the world, so it was a bit touchy. I don't know if it was a good decision or not."

Regardless of the setting, the story did a great job of portraying the in-the-darkness world of global covert ops, and it – alongside the open-ended gameplay – drew people in. It was released on Xbox in 2002, before making it over to PC, PS2, GameCube and mobiles in 2003. "Objectively I don't know if we could have said: 'Yes, it's going to be a success.' Subjectively, you are totally convinced that it will be a success," says François of concerns surrounding how *Splinter Cell* was going to be received. "We thought it was a great game, of course, we thought it was really innovative, from a gameplay point of view it was great. The way stealth was designed with dynamic lighting and the shadows, those iconic moves like the split jump, the cool gadgets, the sticky cameras; there are so many things that when I'm playing it, I love it. It has Tom Clancy, the gameplay is very real, from a technical standpoint it works perfectly, the story is cool: it should work, of course it's going to be a success, you believe in it. Many things can make you doubt yourself, but it worked out." Naturally, it more than worked out: not only did *Splinter Cell* go on to sell over 3 million in just six months and 5 million by its first year, but as a franchise it's now one of the most recognisable in Ubisoft's catalogue. Which is a remarkable feat, considering just how different that original idea was.

"THE WAY STEALTH WAS DESIGNED WITH DYNAMIC LIGHTING, THOSE ICONIC MOVES LIKE THE SPLIT JUMP, THE COOL GADGETS, THE STICKY CAMERAS; THERE ARE SO MANY THINGS THAT WHEN I'M PLAYING IT, I LOVE IT"

[PS2] The covert meetings in alleyways or secret interrogations in CIA buildings – all controlled by the player – helped immerse you into the top-secret geopolitical storyline.

Dragon Quest Heroes: Rocket Slime

GOO REAT FUN

» NINTENDO DS » 2005 » TOSE

There's a very good chance that you haven't played *Dragon Quest Heroes: Rocket Slime*. While it received a US release, it was never released in Europe, meaning many missed out on this charming spin-off of the popular *Dragon Quest* series.

As you can probably tell from the name, the focus of Tose's captivating little game is on a small slime, which not only doubles up as a mascot for the *Dragon Quest* series, but is also one of the franchise's most common enemies. Anyway, this particular slime is called Rocket and his hometown of Boingburg has been destroyed and its inhabitants have been scattered to the four winds. As a result Rocket must not only rescue his missing friends, but also restore his beloved home, opening up useful new shops and locations as more of his friends are rescued.

The game mechanics of *Rocket Slime* are neatly split across two distinct areas, a *Zelda*-styled overhead world and dramatic battles in gigantic vehicles called Schleiman Tanks. When you first visit a new stage you'll hunt around the environments solving simple puzzles, as well as collecting ammo and missing slimes, which can be sent back to Boingburg by using the handy railway system. Battles, on the other hand, are far more grandiose affairs and typically see you assembling a crew from a pool of your rescued friends and loading up your cannons with as much ammo as possible. You'll then see that ordnance fly across the screen, hopefully hitting your opponent's tank or knocking their shells of the air. Cause enough damage and you'll be able to assault the enemy tank and take out its protected heart-shaped engine before your foes manage to do the same to you

It's relatively straightforward as strategy games go, but the later battles do get quite taxing as you manage your available resources and dodge incoming slimes (both sides can use their cannons to fire slimes directly to the other tank). Despite this simplicity, I urge you to track it down, as it's an endlessly charming and entertaining game that proves even the lowliest enemy can sometimes rise to become a hero. ★

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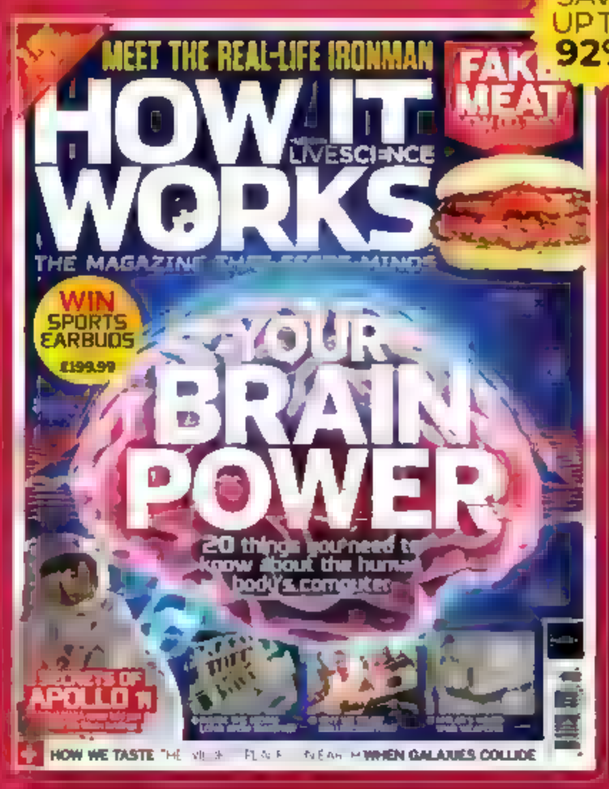

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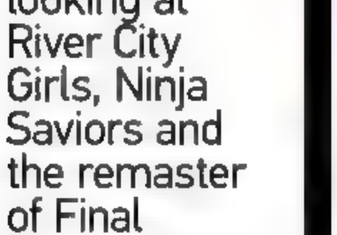
RETRORATED

>> There's lots to cover this month. Nick has been putting the Mega Drive Mini to the test. We've also been looking at River City Girls, Ninja Saviors and the remaster of Final Fantasy VIII

★ PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN

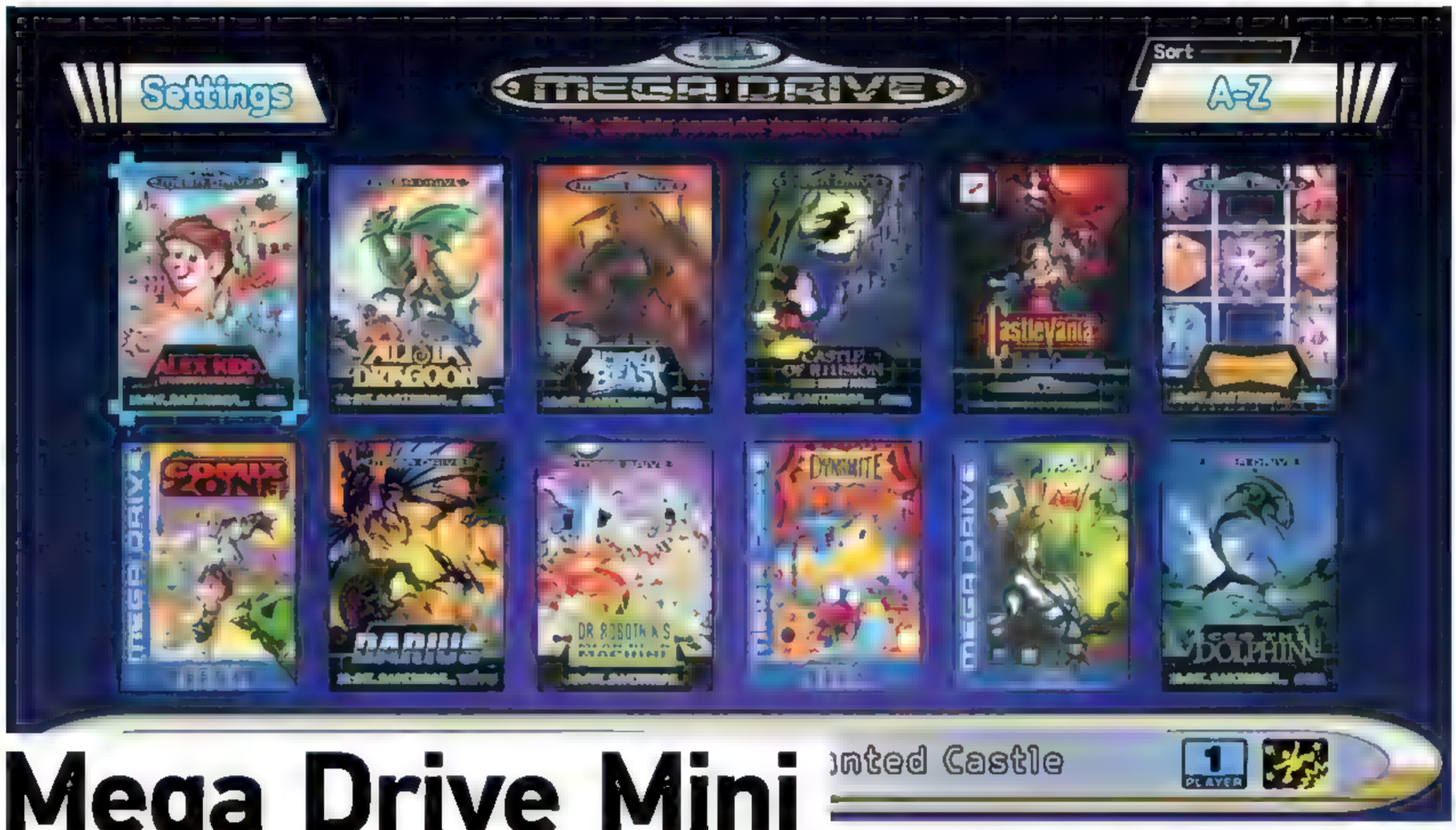
River City Girls

It took a while to click, but I've really enjoyed fighting my way through WayForward's new scrolling fighter.

DREW

Final Fantasy VIII: Remastered

It's my favourite game of all time! With new character models! And boosters! [Screams]



» [Mega Drive Mini] The menu is clean, easy to navigate and themed around the regional packaging for the console

Mega Drive Mini

A CYBER RAZOR CUT ABOVE THE COMPETITION

INFORMATION

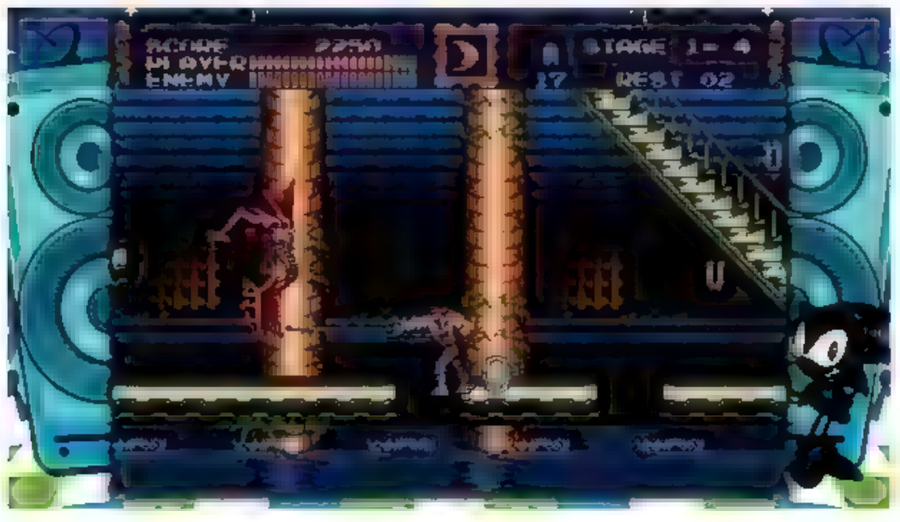
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** £69.99
- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **DEVELOPER:** M2
- **PLAYERS:** 1-2

If there's one thing Sega is good at doing, it's finding ways of keeping the Mega Drive library available. But as anyone who recalls the launch of *Sega Forever* or bought an AtGames licensed clone console knows, those vary greatly quality – for every carefully crafted reissue, there's been a flub. Of course, if you read last month's hands-on impressions with this machine, you'll already know that we think the Mega Drive Mini is great. Now that we've had a final unit in for review, that's our settled stance on the matter.

As a miniature representation of the console, the system is excellent. The Mega Drive Mini recreates the original hardware with greater accuracy than other such systems, including pointless but lovely touches like a moving volume slider and removable expansion port cover. Ports are limited to Micro USB power, HDMI for video output, and two USB controller ports. Two three-button control pads are included, and they feel just as solid as the original controller, though the d-pad feels a little more textured than our admittedly rather worn original controllers

When the machine is switched on, the system goes straight to the menu which is accompanied by a jaunty Yuzo Koshiro-composed theme. There are plenty of options for sorting games, and you can switch to viewing box spines instead of fronts to fit all the games on a single screen. The menu is slightly over-responsive to controller input, and a little clunkier than on the SNES Mini. It's a minor pain that there's no way to immediately load saves, you instead need to load the game, open the menu and then load the state. However, the controller shortcut to return to the menu (hold Start for a few seconds) is a welcome quality-of-life addition for those who don't want to reach over to press Reset on the console.

But the most important thing is that games are responsive and there are no sounds that immediately jump out as weird. That's because the renowned developer M2 handled the emulation for this device. The system outputs 720p and gives you the option for full 16:9, or a 4:3 display with a straight integer scale to 960x672 (for most games). There are a couple of different border art options for that mode, and



»[Mega Drive Mini] Original carts for some games, like *Castlevania Bloodlines*, sell for more than this whole device costs

DRIER HISTORY

» First announced in 2018, the Mega Drive Mini follows in the wake of a number of other companies' efforts, including the Nintendo Classic Mini: SNES, Neo-Geo Mini and PlayStation Classic. The system represents a break from Sega's established practice of allowing third-party manufacturers to create Mega Drive clone consoles under licence. Instead, the company has returned to manufacturing its own hardware, with emulation master M2 in charge of software development. 42 games have been included on each system, with different line-ups for Europe/North America, Japan and Asia, comprising both first-party and third-party releases

»[Mega Drive Mini] Most of the standard favourites that you'd expect, like *Sonic 2*, can be found here

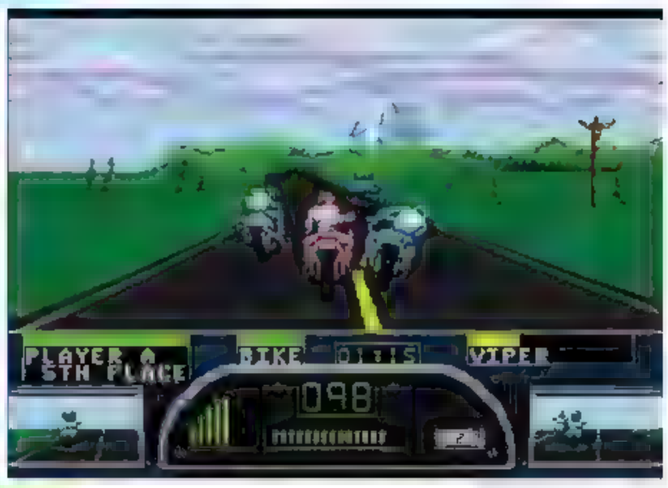
»[Mega Drive Mini] The CRT filter is rather strong, but it's definitely nice to have

there's also an optional CRT filter. It's pretty aggressive, with some dark scanlines and heavy fuzziness, but we'll always welcome such options where they're offered.

Content is where the Mega Drive Mini really shines. There are the first-party games that you'd expect, like *Sonic The Hedgehog* and *Streets Of Rage 2*, of course. But what sets this apart from products like the Sega Mega Drive Classics compilation on consoles is the excellent licensing job. The Mega Drive Mini includes common omissions like *Castle Of Illusion* (licensed by Disney), and a range of third-party hits. These range from popular common games like *Earthworm Jim* and *Road Rash II* to the more difficult-to-acquire releases, including the likes of *Contra: Hard Corps* and *Mega Man: The Wily Wars*. To tempt the hardcore, very good exclusive versions of *Darius* and *Tetris* have been included, as well as the English translation of the rather lovely *Monster World IV*.

With 42 games, Sega's system offers more than most comparable consoles. The amount of variety on offer deserves commendation, and while some of the games are short arcade-style affairs, there's plenty of lasting value thanks to games like *Shining Force* and *Phantasy Star IV*. The only thing that's missing is a great sports game, and maybe an extra racer would have been nice. It has to be said that there are a few more duds here than on the SNES Mini, but the greater number of games means that it also offers more hits and some great deep cuts – who really expected to see *Alisia Dragoon*, after all?

»[Mega Drive Mini] The conversion of *Darius* is new and exclusive, and is very faithful to the original arcade game.



»[Mega Drive Mini] *Road Rash II* is the only racing game on the system, but it's a good one

Of course, no plug-and-play mini console so far has been perfect, and the Mega Drive Mini isn't either. The decision to include three-button pads has drawn some ire, and two games are significantly affected by it – *Street Fighter II* and *Eternal Champions*. We suspect many of you have a better way of playing *Street Fighter II* anyway, but if this is a problem for you, it's not great to have to buy six-button controllers. Having all regional versions of games is great, but some will hate having to switch the system language to access them. Problems beyond that are mostly nitpicks. For example, in the few games that use the Mega Drive's 256 pixel width mode, it's possible to notice horizontal shimmering introduced by the nearest neighbour scaling method. Less perfectionist members of the **Retro Gamer** team didn't notice anything at all, even when playing through treasured favourites.

Ultimately, small niggles shouldn't detract from what Sega has put together here – it's arguably the best plug-and-play retro console to date, with only the SNES Mini as a serious challenger. The hardware and emulation do the original system justice, and the software line-up is an excellent representation of the system's best and most memorable games. At the price, it feels like a bit of a steal. ✱

In a nutshell

The Mega Drive Mini is a triumph, offering an authentic experience and a fantastic library at an affordable price. Whether you're discovering or rediscovering the system, you'll have great fun with it.

RETRO ROUNDUP

WE LOOK AT THE LATEST RETRO-RELATED RELEASES

PICK OF THE MONTH

River City Girls

» **System:** Switch (tested) PC, PS4, Xbox One » **Buy it from:** Online » **Buy it for:** £26.99

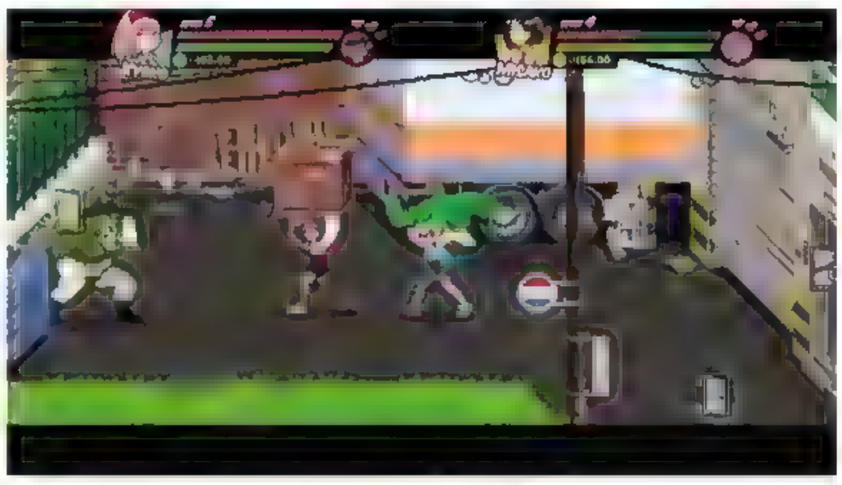
The latest in the *River City/Kunio-kun* franchise is an entertaining spin-off that does the long-running series proud. The game's slight, but very funny, story focuses on two feisty teenagers, Kyoko and Misako, who are trying to find out why their boyfriends (Kunio and Riki from the original games) have been kidnapped. Their violent quest takes them across the length and breadth of River City, from its grimy slums to a Yakuza-infested tower, and it makes for one entertaining shindig. It's worth mentioning that *River City Girls* isn't WayForward's first fighting game rodeo, either. The developer has already cut its teeth on another franchise owned by the publisher (*Double Dragon*) and is no stranger to creating meticulous looking sprites and impossibly fluid animation.

River City Girls expands on all the tricks from *Double Dragon Neon*, suitably adding plenty of extras to ensure your battle on the streets of River City never gets too boring. As is the norm with the series, there are various shops the girls can visit to buy food, beverages and other handy items that can be used to enhance their fighting abilities. Additionally, a couple of dojos are available (overseen by two very famous brothers) where you can buy plenty of new moves, from useful spinning kicks to a hilarious dab attack. That's right, a dab attack.

These extra moves are worth picking up at the earliest opportunity as even the standard enemies can prove quite troublesome if you don't have the relevant moves and skills to beat them. Levelling up your character helps here, but a few sections of the game did feel a little grindy, as did a couple of the very inventive boss encounters. You'll stick with it, though, because everything about WayForward's game is so charming. Yes, the lack of online multiplayer is a bit of a surprise, but grab a mate for some local play and you'll have tremendous fun

» Score **83%**

»[Switch] Show this enemy mercy and they can be recruited, helping you out with a useful attack



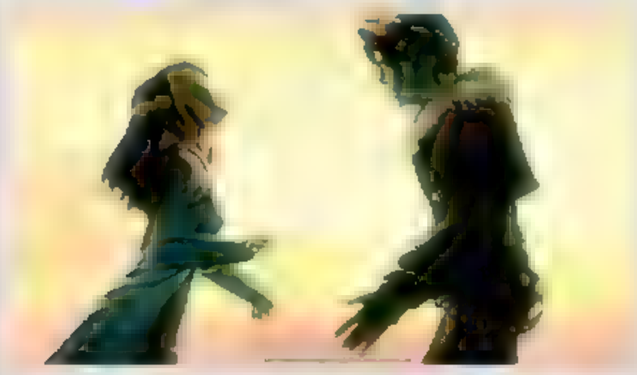
»[Switch] You can use all sorts of weapons in *River City Girls*, from crates and people to oversized fish.

Blasphemous

» **System:** Switch (tested), PS4, Xbox One, PC
» **Buy it from:** Online » **Buy it for:** £19.99

This 2D action game channels the spirit of *Castlevania* and *Metroid*, with a dash of *Dark Souls* and throws in a helmet full of gore for good measure. It goes without saying that *Blasphemous* is one of the most grimdark games we've ever played, its miserable pixel artwork is beautiful – that might sound oxymoronic, but it truly is. As is the case with those previous games we mentioned, you'll find yourself navigating a decaying world while slaying horrific beasties, utilising the game's robust and satisfying combat system. While the environs are fascinating, there are some areas that are an absolute slog to get through, which is a sin worth forgiving all things considered.

» Score **82%**



Final Fantasy VIII Remastered

» **System:** Switch (tested), PS4, Xbox One, PC
» **Buy it from:** Online » **Buy it for:** £15.99

Just in time to celebrate its 20th anniversary on our shores, we've been treated to a new and enhanced port of *Final Fantasy VIII*. Much like the recent editions of *FFVII* and *FFIX* from the last couple of years, you're given a suite of 'boosts' – such as speed-up and no encounters – which makes the experience more respectful of your time. There are also new in-game models for notable characters and monsters, which all look gorgeous. That said, we really do wish an AI was used to help upscale the backgrounds, as they're left intact from the original game and look pretty jarring against the remastered elements. Still, it's a great RPG, though.

» Score **80%**

The Ninja Saviors: Return Of The Warriors

» **System:** Switch (tested), PS4,
» **Buy it from:** Online, retail » **Buy it for:** £16.99

The *Ninja Saviors* is, for the most part, a textbook example of how to remake a classic game. The beat-'em-up, originally released for the SNES, has undergone a full graphical overhaul that makes it look more like a mid-Nineties arcade game. There are two minor setbacks to note, however. Firstly, the final boss is still a frustrating fight that utilises a mechanic that barely matters in the rest of the game, and is much more difficult with some characters than others. Secondly, the most interesting feature for old-timers – the two brand-new characters, with very distinctive playstyles – must be unlocked. Still, these issues don't heavily undermine what is otherwise a fun experience.

» Score **82%**

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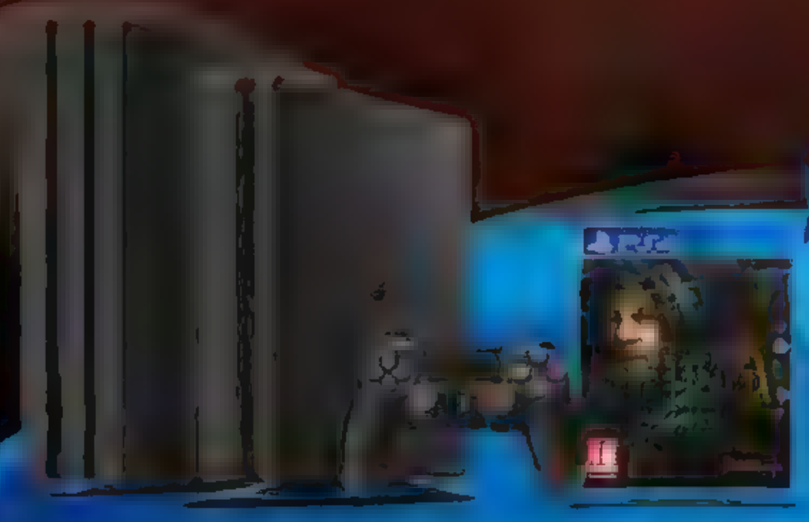

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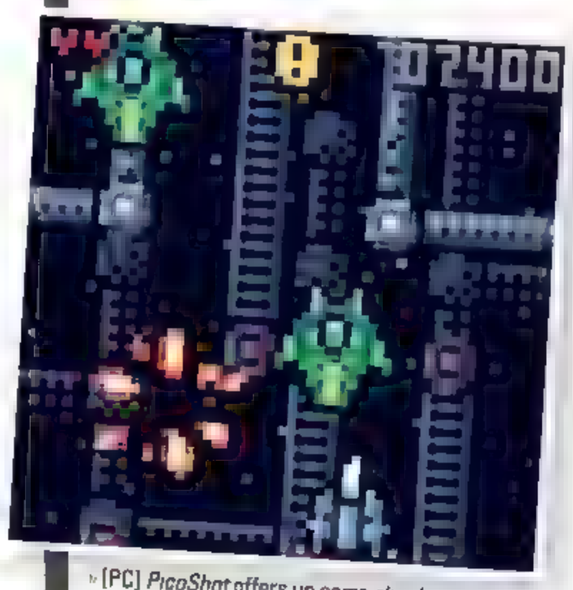
› [C64] It's one player but two ships versus the enemies in *Fulgur*

NEWS

› [LowRes NX] Getting to the heart of the matter, or at least the gut in *Gut Runner*



› [PC] *PicoShot* offers up some chunky pixels and vertically scrolling blasting with parallax.

LO-FI PIXELS

The recent Fantasy Console Game Jam 4 had the theme of 'food', and entrants were given a week to put together a game on their fantasy console of choice, meaning that both the theme and platform were quite open to interpretation. The winner was *Gut Runner* where the player takes the role of a piece of pizza moving through the gut of the person eating it, but a couple of other titles which grabbed our attention were a multidirectional shooter with food as weapons called *The Corruption: The Color Warrior*, and *Sushi Belt*, where sushi dishes are constructed and delivered to consumers by the power of conveyor belts. All of the entries can be found at Kikstart.me.uk/fcj-4

Also drawing to a close recently was another competition prime for entries on fantasy consoles. The LowRezJam's only requirements were that entries used a mere 64x64 pixels and everybody had to meet a deadline of just over two weeks. There weren't any required themes, either, but options were presented including 'illogical solution', 'feed the world', 'text only' and, most intriguingly, 'unplayable' for game developers who needed a little more inspiration.

That open-ended nature led to quite a few entries and the games covered a lot of ground including dungeon-crawlers like *Valkyrie Dungeon Mini*, blasting with vertically scrolling shoot-'em-up *PicoShot* and *Crispy Jumper*'s platforming action. There were also some unusual hybrids, such as *Tankblade* where the titular vehicle has rotating blades used to mash enemies, a few developers threw some processing power at creating 3D games with chunky pixels and even the Game Boy gets a look in with a preview called *Arrow Adventures*. Make your way over to the competition page over at Kikstart.me.uk/lowrez-2019 because, although some of these titles are only playable previews, there's still lots there to have a look through.

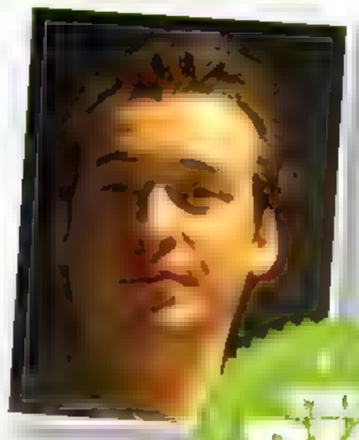
Sensible Software's Shoot-'Em-Up Construction Kit – SEUCK to its friends – has been used to create countless releases over the decades, but there are still developers working on new games with this venerable tool and another 13 were released for the SEUCK Competition in 2019, taking up an impressive four sides of disk. The games which took the top three spots in particular – *Pagoda Warrior 2* by Stefano Canali, *Eleanor Burns' Legion Of The Damned 3* and *Fulgur* from veteran SEUCK user Alf Yngve – are all distinct from one another other, well presented and interesting to play. Kikstart.me.uk/seuck-2019-c64 takes you to the roster.

NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**

HOMEBREW HEROES

We've recently been saving the world with Foreign Frugglers on Steam, so wanted a quick chat with developer Timo Visser about the challenges of drawing low resolution graphics and working with small palettes



BIG INTERVIEW

Where did the initial idea for the game come from?
I wanted to make a really small game, that was also really polished. So a single-screen game worked best! *Space Invaders* is a single-screen game, so I took that as a base and then it grew its own way. The name *Foreign Frugglers* is a bit hard to pronounce, though

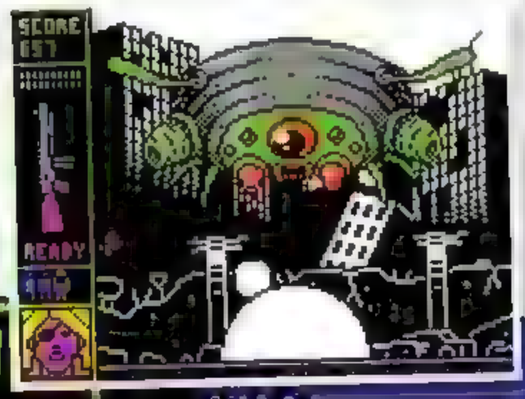
And how about the art style, were there any specific inspirations?
It was a process of cutting away the unnecessary [elements], so I used a minimal amount of pixels. You get that arcade feel with those pure and bright colours. The old *Contra* games on the NES were a big inspiration, and modern indie games, too

Who was involved in the development of *Foreign Frugglers* and roughly how long did it take?
I got some help with music, playtesting and programming – thanks Ivo, Jaswir, Ferdi, and Jons! The web version took me three months to make, and the Steam version another two or three months. Steam integration gave me a firm headache, so I asked for help on that one, too – thanks Jeroen! But I am not done yet, two gameplay updates are in the making.

What kind of feedback has *Foreign Frugglers* received from gamers so far?
It ranges from 'the best game I've ever played' to 'the worst game ever, it doesn't even have a tutorial'! People like the quality of the game, but some don't like punishing arcade games such as this one. Or they think it is too short. Well it is, I'm working on that.

In hindsight, is there anything you would have done differently?
I am pleased with the game itself, but I should have done things differently with the actual Steam release strategy I released it during the Steam Summer Sale, so all attention was going towards other discounted games. Also, it is better to ask friends to buy and review your game, instead of giving them free keys because on Steam the free key reviews don't count! You can always buy them a beer later on.

Finally, do you have any future games planned that our readers would like to know about?
Yes! Interstate *Drifter 2000* is a much bigger game, and quite far in development. It is an isometric race game where you can explore the interstates and side-roads of a big world That game will also be available on Steam.



» [PC] The brightly coloured invasion has begun and only four people can stop it

» [C64] Getting to the key requires a little laser-powered tunnelling.

OY, BERK!

The Commodore 64 has fared well for new games recently, including a port of *Berks 4* from Digital Monastry's newest member Nojeee, who is none other than the game's original author Jon Williams.

The gameplay sees a heavily armed drone launched into a brightly coloured, and hostile, flip-screen world for some arcade-style, multidirectional blasting while collecting keys needed to progress along the way.

A download is available behind Kikstart.me.uk/berks-4-c64 and we're hoping that this meeting of already busy developing minds will lead to many more new 8-bit games

» [Plus/4] The ninja makes new 'friends' and influences them, mostly with violence.

IN THE DARK

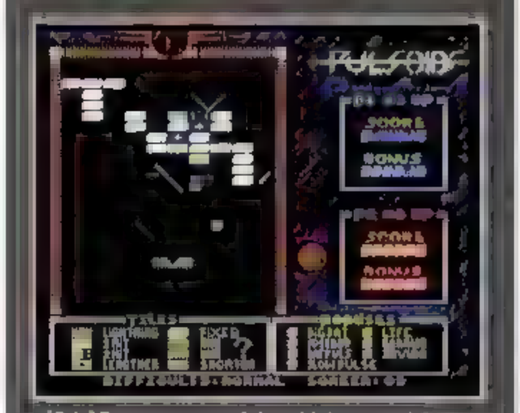
Since the C64 has recently gained a conversion of *Berks 4* it seems fair that the favour is returned. Attendees at the Arok demo party in Hungary during August got to see and play an early preview of *The Last Ninja*, the isometric 3D C64 game originally released in 1987 by System 3 which is being ported to the Plus/4 by Attila Cseri.

There's some way to go before it's complete but what's there is impressive and the preview is available to download and play from Plus/4 World at Kikstart.me.uk/tln-preview-264.

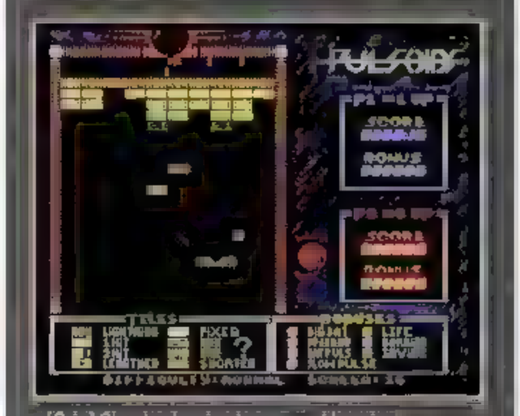
DO YOU REMEMBER?

Originally released on the Spectrum, Amstrad CPC and C64 by budget purveyors Mastertronic, a homebrew conversion of *Pulsoids* was developed on the Oric series in 2003 by Twilighte. The game itself is based on *Arkanoid* but with a twist – rather than bouncing balls, the player's paddle is instead used to deflect lines which travel at 45-degree angles.

That might sound easier to play than the traditional formula, since that movement is more predictable and therefore easier to follow with the paddle, but it turns out that keeping the line in play takes concentration and skill, even more so when they split since there can be several fast-moving objects bouncing around the screen to keep an eye on. *Pulsoids* is available from Kikstart.me.uk/pulsoids-oric and bundled with the Oricutron emulator found at Kikstart.me.uk/oricutron.



» [Oric] Because every *Arkanoid* clone needs the developer's logo within one of the levels



» [Oric] Slowly clearing house and bracing for the speed boost at the top

» [C64] Using the bombs to temporarily disable enemies is incredibly satisfying

ENDLESS FORMS MOST BEAUTIFUL 64

PLATFORM: COMMODORE 64 » **DEVELOPER:** RIKIBBO **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.ME.UK/EFMB-C64 » **PRICE:** FREE

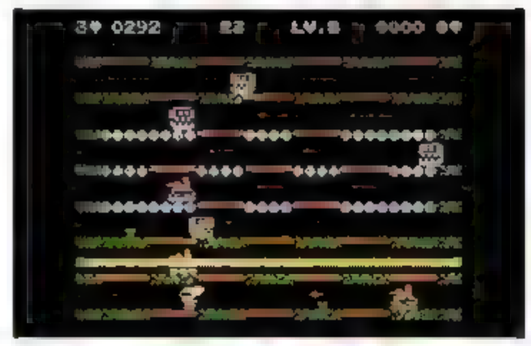
If you've ever had one sock from a pair go missing in the tumble drier, or been positive your keys were by the front door, only to find them on the kitchen table, the chances are you've had a run in with an Imp. These mischievous little critters barely exist in our peripheral vision as they bleed over from their own reality and they don't mean any harm, but there are a couple of races with their own reasons who like to gather Imps up It's unclear why the Moebius clan want Imps but the Puckies consider them a delicacy

Players control either Moebius or Pucky – both can be in play simultaneously if there are two willing players available – and their task is to gather all of the Imps and bonus items on each stage in order to proceed. Each level is arranged into corridors with most being patrolled by enemies that start out relatively docile – they're fatal to the touch but aren't interested in the player – but become trickier as the game progresses. Some of the dastardly Imps conceal bombs which, at a set time after the Imp is collected, explode.

It's possible to move vertically through the stage in a couple of ways, either utilising teleporters by standing on them and using the vertical joystick controls or relying on local space being somewhat distorted to the point where walking off the left or right hand side of the playfield wraps Pucky or Moebius to the opposite side but one row up or down respectively.

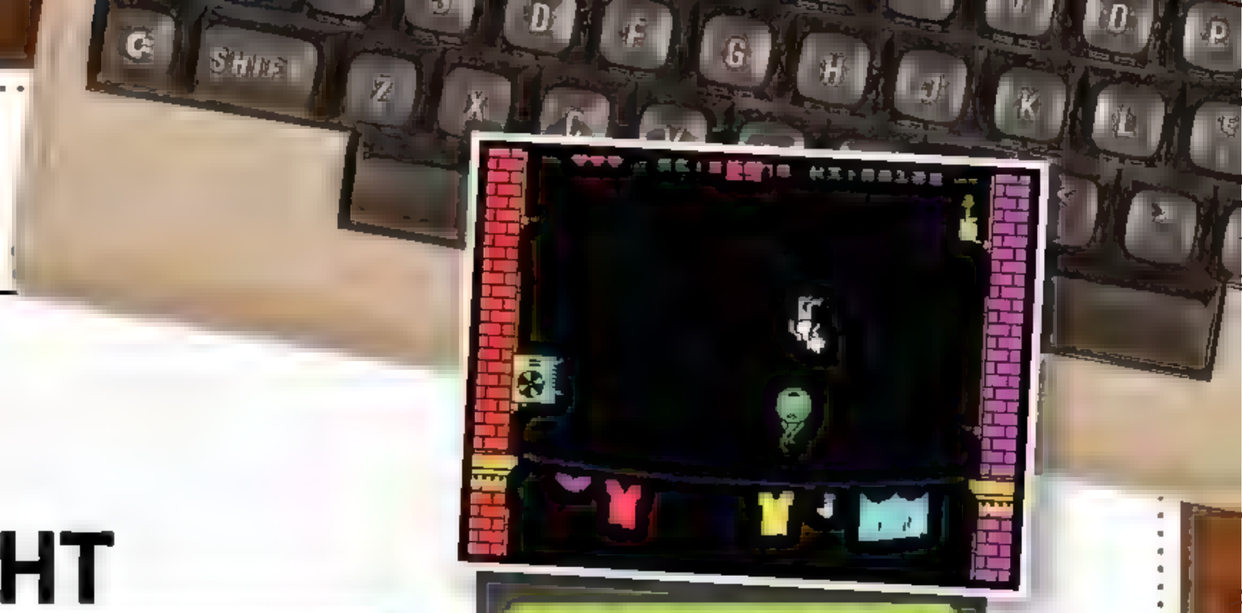
Dave Hughes' original Spectrum version of *Endless Forms Most Beautiful* was released seven years ago in 2012 – which hopefully doesn't make any long-term homebrew fans suddenly feel old – and this new C64 incarnation is based on the revised release put together by Locomalito. The result is both fun and challenging, with players having to learn the movement patterns of each enemy and put a little planning into working out the route through each level that is both safe and efficient.

» [C64] The tanks only fire if facing Moebius, so he's stalking along behind it.



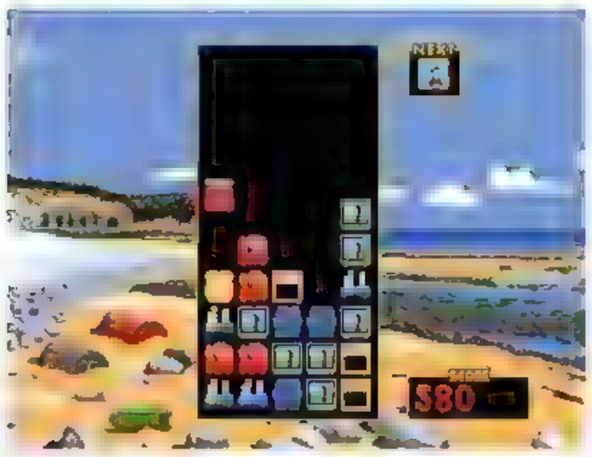
» [C64] Running for the safety of a teleporter and the top corridor

>> Score **88%**



LANDFILL

PLATFORM: COMMODORE AMIGA **DEVELOPER:** CLEBIN
» **DL:** KIKSTART.ME.UK/LANDFILL-AMIGA » **PRICE:** FREE



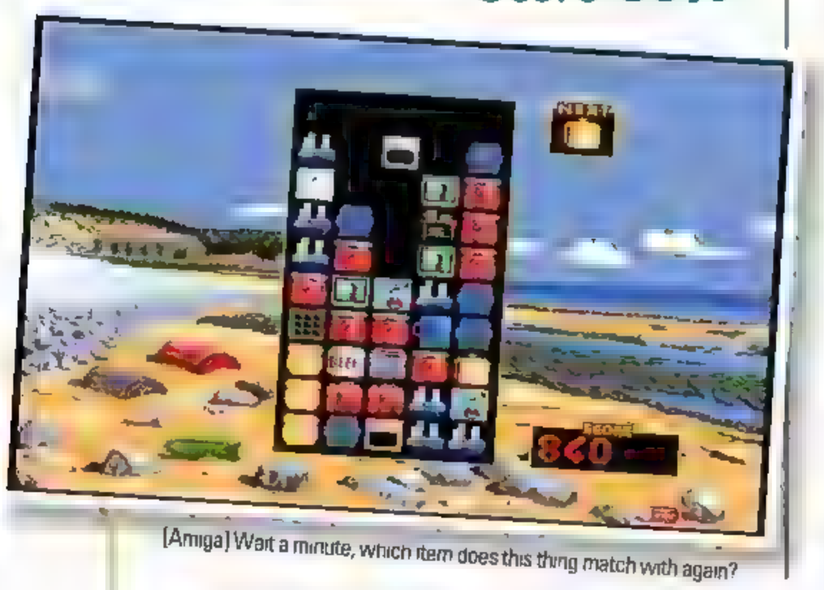
[Amiga] A jam sandwich would be perfect during a nice day at the beach.

Since waste disposal has become a serious problem, recycling is heavily encouraged and, for one landfill site in particular, this has become something of a game. Dumped items must be bundled up to save them from burial but, rather than gathering multiples of the same item, they instead need to be grouped with other things they're associated with.

Remote control units, for example, must be paired with televisions, armchairs or indeed both – placing a remote adjacent to either will cause those surrounding objects to disappear – and matters are complicated as new items are added over time.

That constant expansion is a clever twist on the standard formula and *Landfill* therefore changes as it progresses, so, while it might initially seem to be a simple pattern matching game, having to remember which objects can be paired up turns it into a combination of action puzzle and memory test.

» Score **86%**



[Amiga] Wait a minute, which item does this thing match with again?

HEARTLIGHT

PLATFORM: COMMODORE PLUS/4 **DEVELOPER:** KÁROLY NAGY
» **PRICE:** FREE » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.ME.UK/HEARTLIGHT-264

Time to dash between boulders once more, this time in the name of love as Mosiek tries to demonstrate his cunning and skill to woo the lovely Rachel. To this end he heads off on a brave and foolhardy quest to collect hearts which have been buried deep underground, but along the way will need to avoid being crushed by falling boulders, killed by grenades or pushed into impossible situations by huge, helium-filled balloons.

Initially this looks like a simple, single-screen *Boulder Dash*-style affair but it's actually more similar to more puzzle-oriented games like *Robbo* – the Atari 8-bit version of *Heartlight* shares a programmer – so just rushing around while grabbing every heart in sight is almost certain to end in failure. Knowing how each of the in-game elements react is just as essential as keen reflexes here, and planning ahead is a requirement for success.

» Score **83%**

» [Plus/4] There's about to be a loud 'bang', but it won't help with finishing the stage.

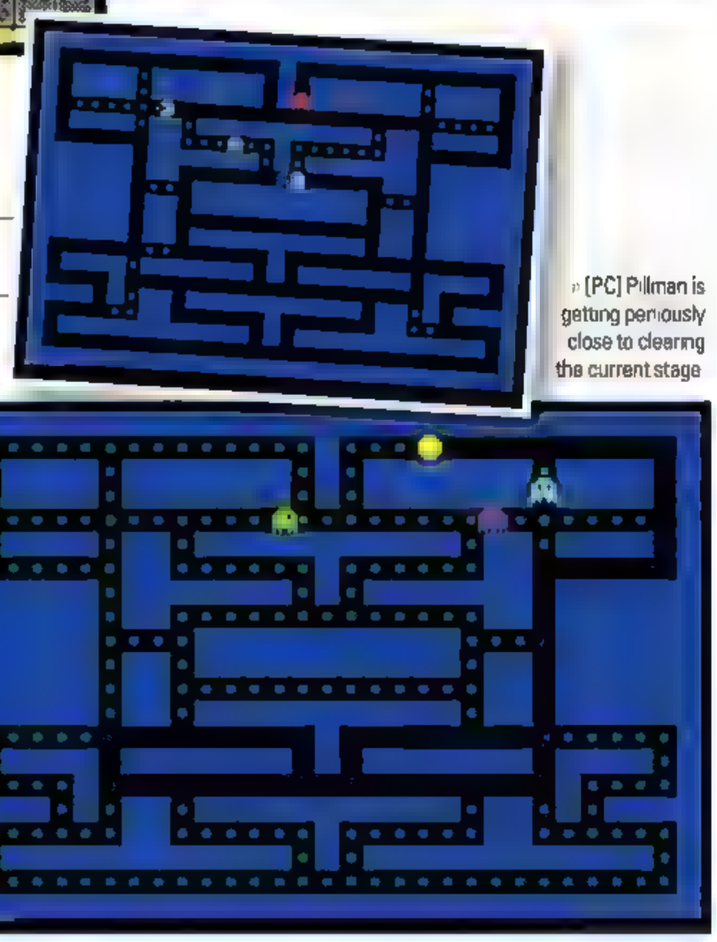
PILLMAN

» **PLATFORM:** PC » **DEVELOPER:** ÓSCAR TOLEDO GUTIÉRREZ
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.ME.UK/PILLMAN-DOS » **PRICE:** FREE

We have a maze full of dots, a yellow spherical character wanting to eat them and four phantoms eyeing the aforementioned dot consumer. This should all sound familiar because *Pillman* is a *Pac-Man* variant, but an unusual one since it occupies less than 512 bytes of hard disk space.

The concessions made to get this game so small have damaged it somewhat, and playing without power pills or tunnels is tough to the point where – despite the ghosts not being particularly bright and suddenly changing direction to wander off halfway through a chase – it's still significantly harder to complete a stage than with Namco's original.

» Score **68%**



» [PC] Pillman is getting perilously close to clearing the current stage.

» [PC] Getting the ghosts to behave how you want is pretty tough.

ROUNDUP

Tuckersoft's *Nohzdyve* is a bizarre game where the player jumps out of a building and dives head-first towards the ground, catching flying eyeballs and avoiding hazards along the way. The Spectrum version was developed as an Easter egg for the *Black Mirror* interactive episode *Bandersnatch* on Netflix, but now MSX gamers can enjoy a conversion from developer Giovanni Nunes. Dive head-first to the action at Kikstart.me.uk/nohzdyve-msx.

Another conversion is *Augmentine*, but this time it takes the Spectrum version of Geoff Crammond's hugely acclaimed 3D puzzle game *Sentinel* and wraps it up in a Windows powered shell to massively increase the refresh rate and graphical resolution. The result is significantly quicker gameplay but the game still plays like the original. Transfer to the Syntrolo at Kikstart.me.uk/augmentine-win for more information.

DIFFICULTY

●○○○○

LOW

FORMAT

» **ALL**

HANDY HINTS

» If you hit a dead end and decide to ask a developer, be smart – if they're already answering questions or posting about their work on Twitter, it's probably okay. If you've had to track down a pseudonymous, locked-down Facebook profile, leave them alone.

» Do you need a particular magazine and have had no luck in finding it? If you're supremely desperate, the British Library will have a copy – you'll have to actually travel over there to read it, though.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED

» Old games magazines

» A device you can browse the internet on

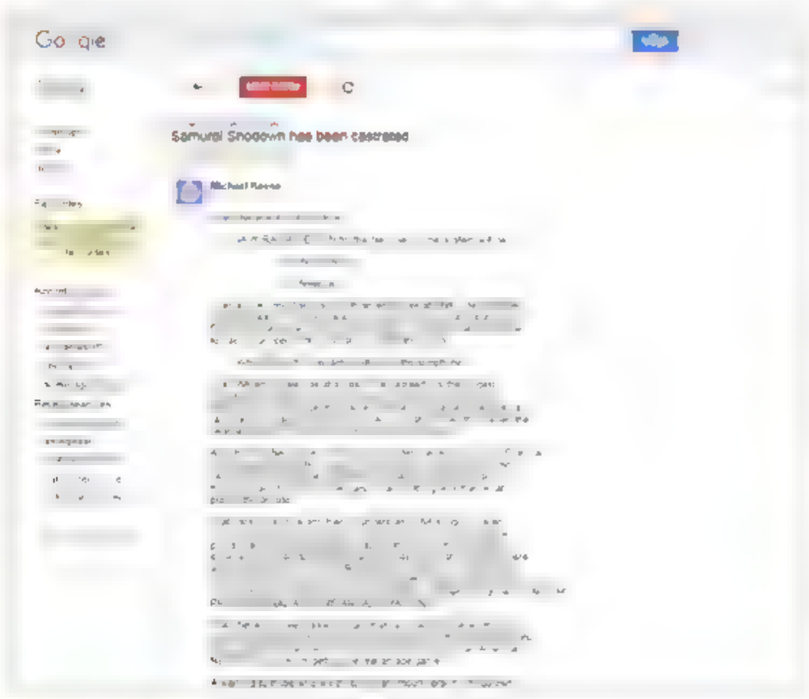
HOW TO

RESEARCH OLD GAMES

Do you ever find yourself wanting to know something about a particular game, only to find the information isn't out there? We do – but it often is out there, if you know where to look

GAMES MAGAZINES

The specialist games press is an obvious source of information on most gaming topics – but don't just look at the regular magazines. Trade publications like *Computer Trade Weekly* and *MCV* also carried valuable information, and don't forget to look for old gaming TV shows like *GamesMaster* and *Games World*.

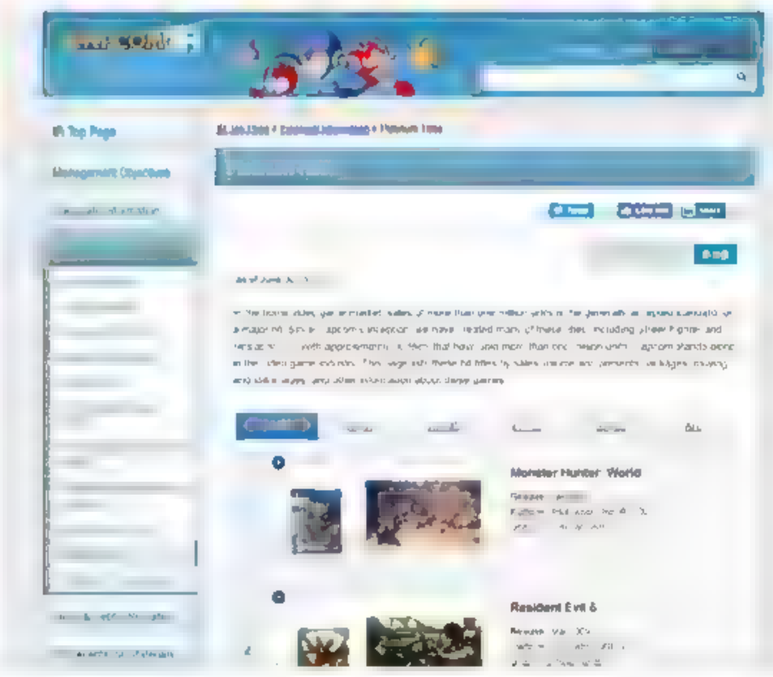


USENET

Before social media and web forums, many online gaming discussions used to take place on Usenet groups which you can browse via Google Groups. They're poor for facts, but they brilliantly document how the general public reacted to major events. Alternatively, browse alt.digitiser for topics like "Mr Biffo had my babies".

COMPANIES' OWN INFORMATION

Many companies put out plenty of useful data for free online, typically as part of their 'Investor Relations' pages. It's not just about their overall financial performance – for example Nintendo offers sales breakdowns for hardware and software, broken down by year and region, and Capcom lists all of its million-selling games.



ADVERTISING

Prices and release dates are often frustratingly difficult to verify, but advertising can help. Again, don't just look in games magazines for print ads or on YouTube for TV ads – product brochures included in game boxes, publisher newsletters and even old Argos catalogues can be a great source of information.

Something you'd like to see a guide for? Contact us at:
RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

WHAT NEXT?

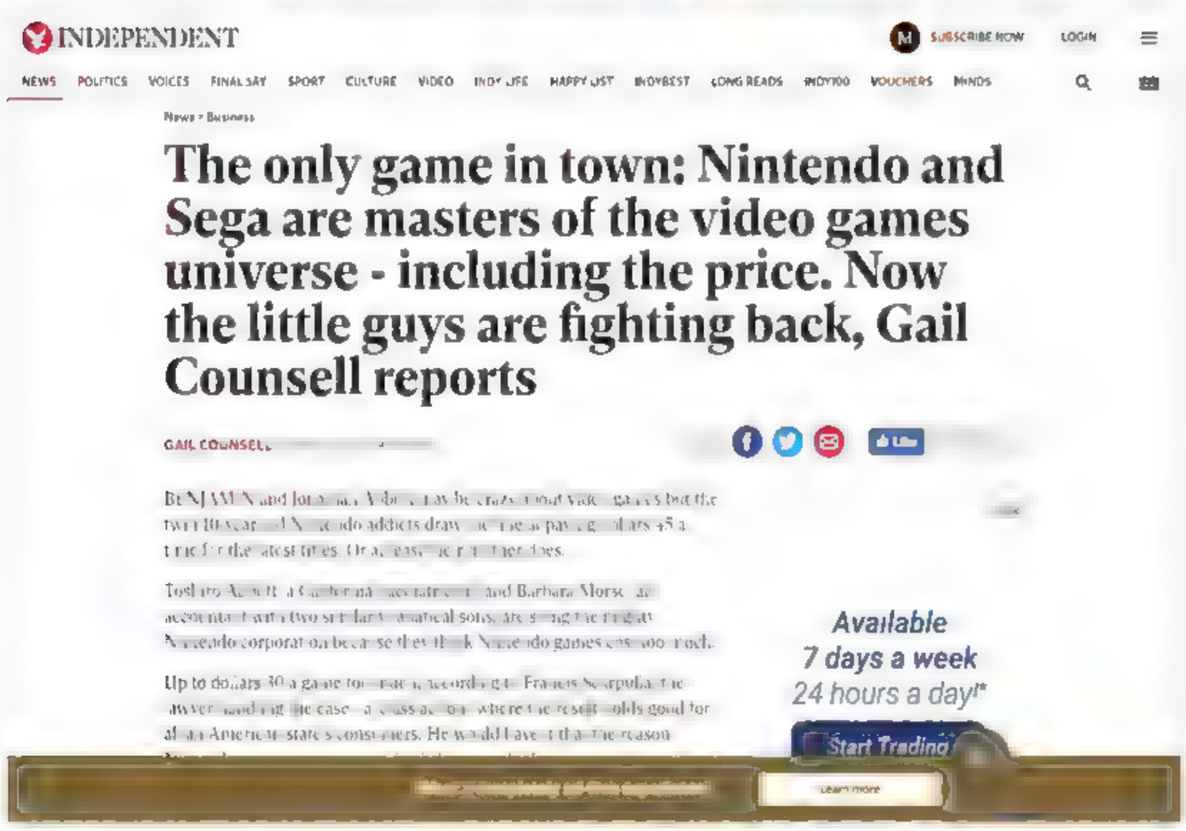
Q: Two sources are contradicting each other! What do I do?

A: Typically, the best thing to do is to search for a third source that corroborates one of the other two. If you can't find one, assess the evidence critically by asking certain questions. Could things have changed between the two publication dates? Could one source contain a factual error? What's the relative credibility of the sources – does one trump the other with official status, for example? It's a pain, but when there are no other options left to pursue, our reasoning is all that we're left with.

Q: What about information that wasn't published in English?

A: This is tricky and you'll often rely on the goodwill of others to get such information. For bigger franchises, fan sites will often have enough international reach that someone can interpret. Alternatively, sites like shmuplations.com may have translated articles of interest.

"Many companies put out plenty of useful data for free online, typically as part of their 'Investor Relations' pages"


INDEPENDENT

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News > Business

The only game in town: Nintendo and Sega are masters of the video games universe - including the price. Now the little guys are fighting back, Gail Counsell reports

GAIL COUNSELL

BENJAMIN and Jonathan Yeh[illegible] may be crazy about video games but the two 10-year-old Nintendo addicts draw the line at paying dollars 45 a title for the latest ones. Or at least their parents do.

Toshiro Aoyagi, a California accountant, and Barbara Morse, an accountant with two similarly fanatical sons, are suing the Japanese Nintendo corporation because they think Nintendo games cost too much.

Up to dollars 30 a game for some, according to Francis Scarpulla, the lawyer handling the case, a class action where the result could good for all an American state's consumers. He would have it that the reason

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Start Trading

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THE WIDER PRESS

If you're after more finer business details, looking at old games magazines won't do you any luck as they were largely ignored by their respective teams. However, trade magazines and news publications are usually great sources of information. For rarely discussed subjects, such as market share and advertising spending, we've often consulted sources such as the BBC, *The Independent* and *Marketing Week*.

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

A selection of smaller questions from readers

AMIGA POWER

I want to play old Amiga games that my dad used to play on his Amiga 500. What's the best/easiest way to go about it? PC and emulator, Raspberry Pi and emulator? Buy an Amiga 500 and games?
Mike

An original Amiga 500 is one option, although the original floppy disks are failing as time goes on. There are other options, though – Amiga Forever uses the excellent WinUAE emulator and includes officially licensed versions of Kickstart and Workbench, as well as games and demos. Antstream also includes a reasonable selection of officially licensed Amiga games and is very easy to use, though you should check out our review in issue 198 before you put down your money.

SCART ATTACK

What are affordable ways of having as many consoles plugged in as possible without ever having to mess around behind the telly swapping SCART cables?
Kev Moneyball Mase

You'll need to get yourself a SCART switcher – but they're becoming less common these days. The cheapest models offer manual switching, which means you'll need to get up and physically push switches each time you want to start a different console. For real convenience, you'll need automatic switches that detect which port has an active signal – these typically also need a power supply of their own.

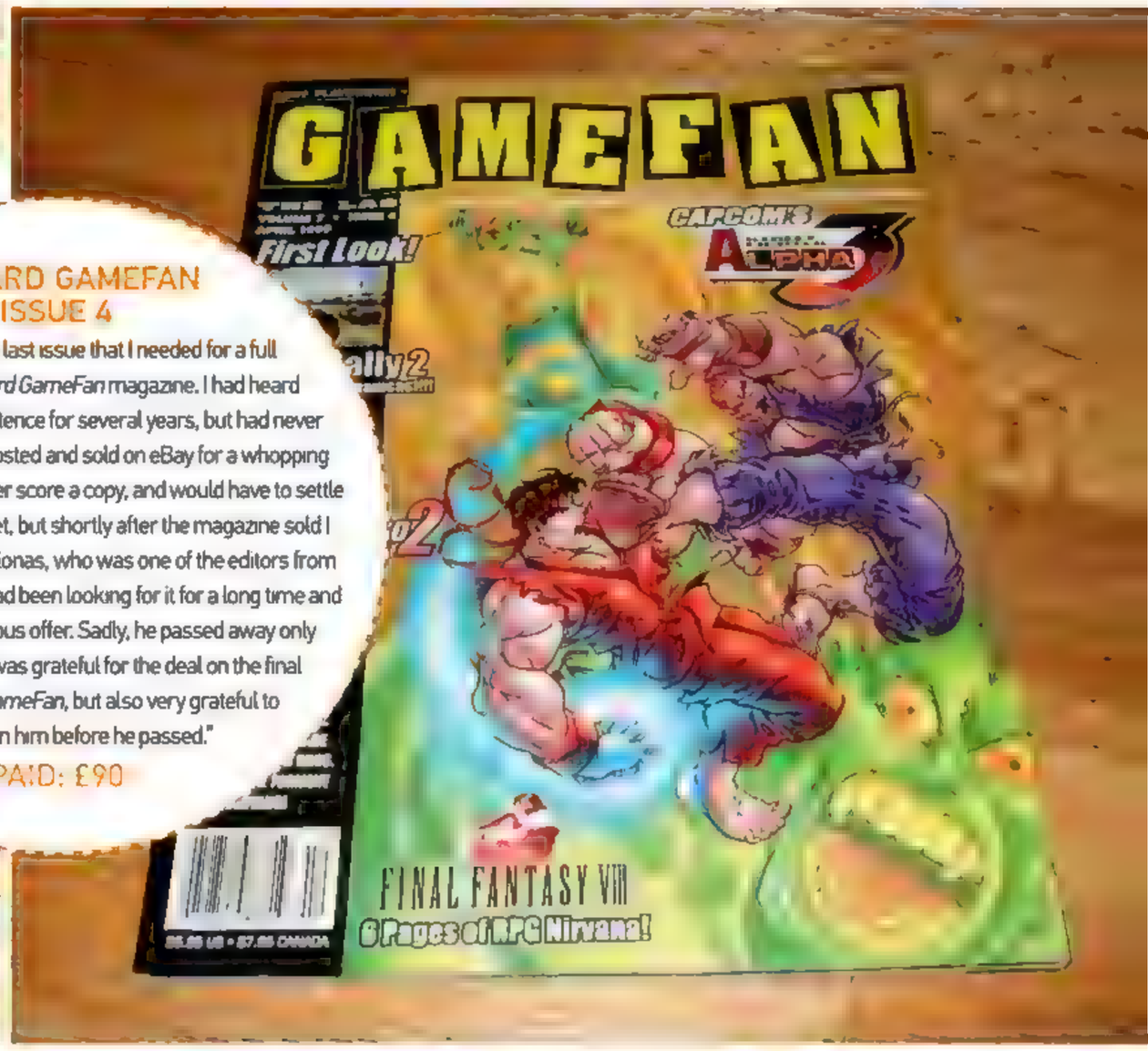
HARD TIMES

As a guy in his mid-forties I worry that my better days are behind me. Surely the day will come when one won't be able to play our beloved (retro) games due to an ageing brain that just can't hack it anymore. Do you have any advice?
Simon Forward

As studies have shown that learning reshapes the brain and can slow the progression of diseases such as Alzheimer's, it's possible that trying to acquire a new skill may help you. Although you'll have less time to play games, you'll gain value in other potentially exciting ways. You may also choose to adjust the types of games you play, trading in fast action for slower, more considered experiences. However, the best advice we can offer is not to worry about cognitive decline, because you may never experience it – you could stay sharp well into your old age. Alternatively, you may not reach old age at all. Life is chaotic, and none of us know how long we have. We should enjoy life while we can, and share it with those we love.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

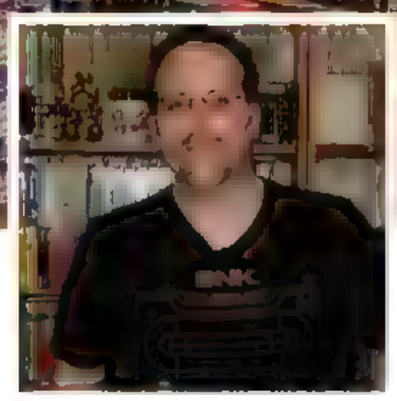
READERS TAKE US THROUGH THE RETRO KEYHOLE



DIEHARD GAMEFAN ISSUE 4

"This was the very last issue that I needed for a full 88-issue set of *Diehard GameFan* magazine. I had heard only rumours of its existence for several years, but had never seen proof until it was posted and sold on eBay for a whopping $535 USD! I figured I'd never score a copy, and would have to settle for a 'nearly complete' set, but shortly after the magazine sold I was contacted by Eric Mylonas, who was one of the editors from *GameFan*. He saw that I had been looking for it for a long time and made me a very generous offer. Sadly, he passed away only a few months later. I was grateful for the deal on the final missing issue of *GameFan*, but also very grateful to have known him before he passed."

PAID: £90



BIO

NAME:
Matt Henzel

FAVOURITE GAME:
The Legend Of Zelda

FAVOURITE CONSOLE:
NES

LOCATION:
USA

ESTIMATED VALUE:
Priceless

WEBSITE:
videogameobsession.com

GROW TOGETHER

This month we show off a lifelong collector

Matt Henzel is quite an unusual addition to Collector's Corner as his collection has actually grown up with him. Where some of our featured collectors sold off their original items and purchased replacements, Matt has kept everything, and has sent us the photos to prove it! "I first started gaming with a *Pong* clone, which our parents bought for my brothers and I in 1977, and then I began actually collecting games with the ColecoVision in 1982," he tells us. "By definition 'collecting' back then just meant that I never sold or returned any of the games I had obtained. I wasn't trying to fill shelves with boxes back then. In fact, I used to keep everything in a closet until the Nineties. I was ten when the ColecoVision came out so I really connected with that. I appreciated it for its solid arcade ports and loved playing *Donkey Kong*, *Lady Bug* and *Q*Bert*, to name a few. Of course, the NES just took everything to the next level. I quickly fell in love with that system.

The NES certainly did leave a big impression on Matt, so much so that he went out of his way to amass a complete collection of the NES 'Black Box' series, which includes the likes of *Duck Hunt*, *Super Mario Bros* and *Gyromite*. Again though, many of these games were purchased back when the system was first released, saving Matt a good deal of money. "I started getting games for the NES in 1985," Matt recalls. "By 1987 I probably already owned around 20 of the 30 total Black Box games They were pretty cheap for the time, selling for around $20 each. I was a fan of the games, and am very nostalgic for this time period of Nintendo. The black starry backgrounds, pixelated artwork, and of course ROB up front and personal. It was a nice change from the artwork which we had seen on previous generations. Since I nearly had all 30 of them by 1999 I decided to just go ahead and buy the final two games, those being *Stack-Up* and *Donkey Kong JR Math*. I believe I paid around $120 for *Stack-Up*, but it was actually a brand-new copy, with only the top of the cellophane cut. I paid only $20 for a complete and mint copy of *DKJR Math*. It's a game which obviously wasn't popular and therefore had a limited print run Mint/complete-in-box copies of this are now fetching upwards of $2,500. It's a set that I'm glad I own, and I'd likely never be able to get it back if I ever were to sell it."

Magazines are also a great passion of Matt's life and he has an impressive selection which includes everything from *Electronic Gaming Magazine*, *Nintendo Power*, *Sega Visions* and of course, **Retro Gamer**. "Videogame magazines are great little time capsules," explains Matt, who has been running the website *videogameobsession.com* for the last 20 years. "I love grabbing a random old magazine and browsing through it. It's funny how the adverts that once annoyed me are now something I enjoy seeing. I am lucky to have complete collections of *Electronic Gaming Monthly*, *GameFan*, *Nintendo*

FATMAN

"Most people think I'm kidding when I say that I've had more fun with this game than just about any other Sega 16-bit game. Truth be told, it's not a great game, but the two-player vs mode is one of the funnest and funniest games I've ever played!"

PAID: £70

Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA

"I am very happy to have a factory-sealed copy of the original *Legend Of Zelda*, since it's my favourite game. I ended up buying it from another collector while I was working at a videogame store in the Nineties."

PAID: £75

MINT/ COMPLETE NES DELUXE SET

"I found an amazing deal on one via eBay and bought it. It was missing some bits (plastic bags, twist ties, grey Zapper lightgun, manual and large poster), but I actually had all of those from various other trades, so it all came together perfectly!"

PAID: £65

Power, Next Generation, Video Games & Computer Entertainment, GamePro, Fun Club News, Power Flash, Team Sega Newsletter, Sega Visions, Official Xbox Magazine, and several others."

Contrary to some collectors, Matt rarely collects sealed games, preferring instead to play the games he owns, and he's not really interested in collecting complete system sets, either. Having said that, he does make a few exceptions. "I do sometimes like collecting subsets, such as the mentioned NES Black Boxes," he admits. "Some others that I collect are the 20 Tengen black NES carts and the 1989 first party Genesis games with the large black grid art style."

So with Matt having collected games for so long, we were keen to know what advice he had for those just starting out with their journeys, and as you'd expect it's some pretty sensible wisdom. "If you have a limited area in which to keep your collection, then I would suggest collecting only the games which you enjoy the most, or those which have some personal meaning to you," he imparts. "Also, keep in mind that you may have to move your collection some day. That can be very stressful and expensive if you have a large collection. I know this personally after spending $1,200 in plastic totes, bubble wrap, tape, gas money, and U-Haul rentals. It's just something to keep in mind." ★

Here's Matt opening his Neo-Geo on Christmas Day, 1990. He still has it today.

JEWEL IN THE CROWN

NEO-GEO AES

"I was blown away by the pictures of *Baseball Stars Professional* and especially *Magician Lord*. It was something I knew I had to have. So I started saving my money. I worked at a retail store warehouse, as well as [doing] snow removal. Luckily, we had a very snowy winter that year. By December I had more than enough money saved up to buy the Neo-Geo Gold System, so then all I had to do was convince my parents that I wanted to buy a very expensive game system. They were not really big on that idea, but they knew that I worked very hard to earn the money. Since it was arriving within a couple of days before Xmas, I just had my mom wrap it all up, and I would open them on Xmas morning. It made for an amazing day, too!"

PAID: $748.85

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY... SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE FUTURE FORUM. WWW.RETROGAMER.NET

WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a spanking copy of either our NES/Master System or SNES/Mega Drive books

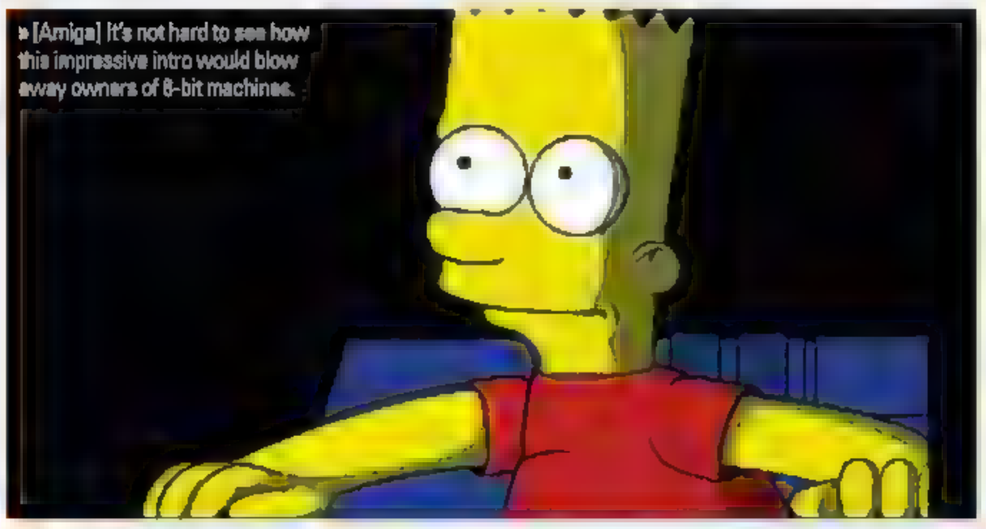
STAR LETTER

WHAT'S IN AN AGE?

Dear **Retro Gamer,**
Time flies when you're having fun… one Christmas 30 odd years ago, my brother got an Amiga 500 Plus and proudly showed off the *Bart Vs The Space Mutants* cutscene which blew my Amstrad CPC 464 away – I simply couldn't believe a computer could produce these graphics. After reading your magazine and mentioning this briefly to my wife, she gave me the best Christmas present I could receive, a (yellowing) Amiga 500. I promptly gave it pride of place over the PS4 to teach our eight-year-old son the true meaning of proper games.

Since then I have had a steady stream of my 35-year-old mates and colleagues exclaiming, "Oh my god, you got a Amiga 500!" and asking if they can "come around and play" like it was 1990 all over again. True classics such as *The Chaos Engine* and *Alien Breed* still stand out today. The ex-workers of Commodore should be truly proud that 30 years after it was built (in West Germany, stamped on the back), it's still doing what it was designed to do – bring pure enjoyment. I wonder, will the PS4 be doing the same in 2049?

It's lovely to hear that your wife tracked one down for you after such a brief mention – that's good gift-giving skill. Likewise, it's great to hear that your friends have been into it, too. We find that even if most people won't track down old games themselves, many will enjoy a good bit of retro gaming if given the opportunity. But while you've told us about the experiences of the adults in your life, we're curious to know what your son made of it all. Did he learn the true meaning of proper games? Do let us know!


» [Amiga] It's not hard to see how this impressive intro would blow away owners of 8-bit machines.

CONCEALED CHARACTER

Dear **Retro Gamer,**
I have been a fan of the magazine for a long time. When I was reading issue 198, I noticed if you go to the section about The Software Toolworks, the giant logo on the top of the page has Mario's face hidden on it. Did you know this?

Yes, we did – the logo we took was from one of the licensed *Mario* games the developer made. Should we have picked a different one? We don't think so. It's kind of comforting to think that Mario is always watching over us. Even when we're asleep. *Especially* when we're asleep.

EXPIRATION EXASPERATION

Hi **Retro Gamer,**
One thing that has struck me is the way that (these days) big publishers seem to muck us gamers around.

When I was on holiday in Taiwan I found a sealed second-hand PS3 copy of *Splatterhouse*. The back of the box said that it was in Chinese and English (for the cutscene subtitles, in-game speech and menu options). The price was bearable and the box read, "unlock all three original *Splatterhouse* games", so knowing that PlayStation 3 games are not region-locked, I bought it. The shop does not allow even their second-hand games to be opened, you have to buy 'as is'. I also had to wait until I got back to the UK to test the game still ran on my UK console.

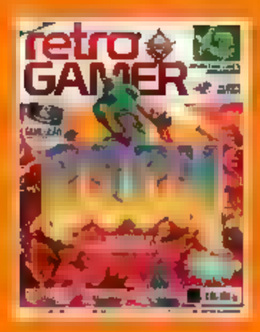
Indications were good before testing the game: the scratch card with the unlock code was in the box, and it, crucially, had not been scratched off by anyone yet. However, when I ran the game in the UK and entered the unlock code, the game said: "The code you have entered may not be correct or may no longer be valid." I know that the code is definitely correct. The small scratch card inside the DVD box reads in fine print: "limited time offer". The outside of the game's box says nothing about a limited time offer.

It seems diabolical that a publisher can trick people in this way into buying software that should work, is not region-locked, but is not complete as stated (based on information available only after purchase). As a retro gamer, I was keener to play the original side-scrolling games than the new PS3 3D version (which ironically works fine and has not 'expired')

Isn't this false representation false marketing a trade descriptions violation? Although the game was manufactured in Hong Kong, region locking is not a PS3 policy, so place of purchase should not mean anything. The game should work in every country where Sony/Namco sell: Hong Kong, UK and Taiwan are all certainly their territories. So a game bought in Taiwan should meet UK consumer law, which I think it does not in this case

This (to me) seems similar to buying a second-hand book and finding the last chapter is missing or has 'expired'. This seems to be a cynical way for publishers to force us into paying again and again for things that we already own. It's no wonder that videogame piracy happens.

What do you guys think? Sorry for the somewhat negative thrust of this letter, and **Retro Gamer** itself is still great!



CONTACT US

here. If your argument that it should be subject to UK laws because it works on UK systems were to be applied universally, you could soon expect your DVDs to conform to the media laws of other PAL Region 2 countries, like Saudi Arabia.

CABINET MINISTER

Hi **Retro Gamer**,

I recently bought an Arcade1Up *Street Fighter II* cabinet and wondered if you've thought about doing a feature on arcade machines at home? I love mine in my games room, nestled between my mini consoles and original hardware. The UK seems to be slow in getting new cabs, let's hope that *Final Fight*, *Mortal Kombat* and *Turtles* get over to our shores soon. It's a different experience to playing on my consoles so I'd consider buying more and collecting!

Glad you're enjoying the machine, Darren. We haven't got such a feature in the works right now, but it's an idea we'll look into – plenty of people love having a cabinet at home, including Darran.

We definitely think it's pretty naughty not to state the expiration date of a limited-time offer, nor indicate the limited time nature of the offer on the outside of the box. However, it's a little harder to agree with the other issues. Firstly, we're not sure the code was even expired, because we're guessing you tried to redeem it on a UK PlayStation Network account. That won't work, you will need a Taiwanese account. Secondly, those three games are still accessible, as you can unlock them by playing through the main game.

Also, UK law won't apply. While the game works on a UK console, the publisher never offered that package here, and you didn't buy it

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Issue 200

While we've naturally put together this issue with the greatest of care and attention, you'll notice that the next one bears a big, distracting number. Planning for issue 200 has reached its critical stage – we even let the rest of the office go on ahead to its summer party while we had a meeting about it. What did we come up with? Well, that would be telling...

Your say

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know...

What was your favourite shareware game?

Crusty Starfish

It has to be something that I still play to this day... *Deluxe Galaga - Amiga* by Edgar Vigdal (it's still available as *Warblade* on iPhone and other systems).

Cheeky Crissy

It's *Doom*, man, without a shadow of a doubt. We snuck it into the computer room in college, students were playing it, tutors were playing it... it was the jam in 1993!

deKayman Islands Holding Company

Wolfenstein 3D on the Acorn. It's what Sixth Form lunchtimes were made for, although we had to keep hiding the game in increasingly ingenious ways on the hard drives. Inside other applications, for example.

Dave Stokes

Duke Nukem 3D, hands down. It was a revelation. Secret areas, Easter eggs, a witty main character, an awesome soundtrack, and great weapons. I bought the full game as soon as I could because of it.

Allan

I want to say *Doom*, but I have a real soft spot for *Rise Of The Triad*. The over-the-top explosions, blood, guts and flying eyeballs appealed to my younger self.

Stuart Wilson

I had a soft spot for a horizontal shooter called *Cybernetix: The First Battle* on the Amiga. It had some great graphics and the music was absolutely brilliant.

Ethan Knight

One Must Fall 2097! You got so much content with the 'free' shareware version that it honestly felt like playing a full game anyhow.

Johnroy Staples

Cosmos Adventure! I loved the cartoony look, the unique wall climbing, and the cool chunky sound effects.

Kara The Damned

Scorched Earth – it's simple, playable and really addictive, with a few players it was almost impossible to beat, at least until *Worms* came along.

Simone Caronno

For sure: *Tyrian*. Best PC vertical shmup ever made.

retro GAMER

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Printed by

William Gibbons & Sons Ltd, 26 Planetary Road, Willenhall, WV13 3XT

Distributed by Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU www.marketforce.co.uk Tel: 0203 787 9060

ISSN 1742-3155

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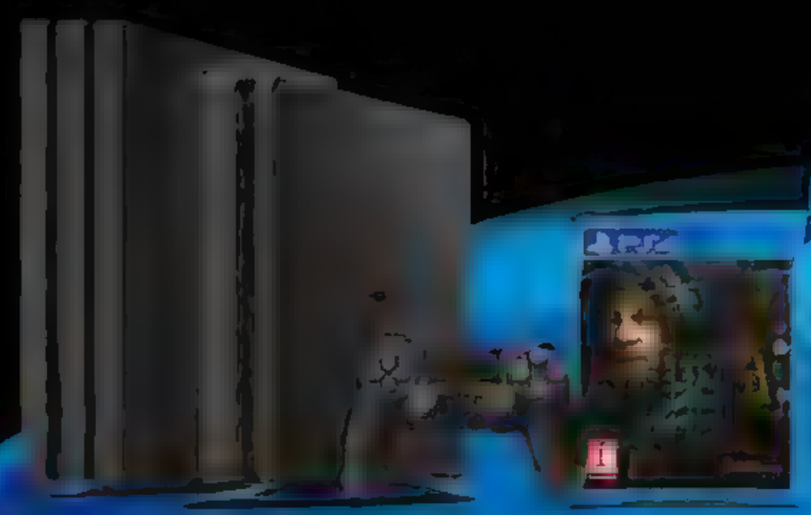

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ENDGAME

WASTED DREAMS

We humans have gone and ruined Earth. Whoops! Luckily, the ExplorerFX2 crew has found Agillera, a hospitable new planet. Hooray! Unfortunately, when the bulk of the crew decides to return home with the good news, the ship is involved in an incident. You've survived, having ejected in an escape pod and crashed back on Agillera – but what happens next? Let's skip to the end and find out...

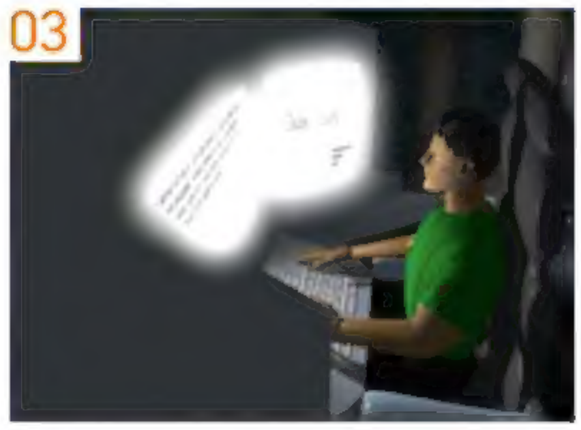
01

» Oh no. It turns out that the 'incident' with the ship was a deliberate plan to shoot it down, orchestrated by those remaining on Agillera. Since they're rather hostile, you decide it's best to wreck their plans and flee the planet.

02

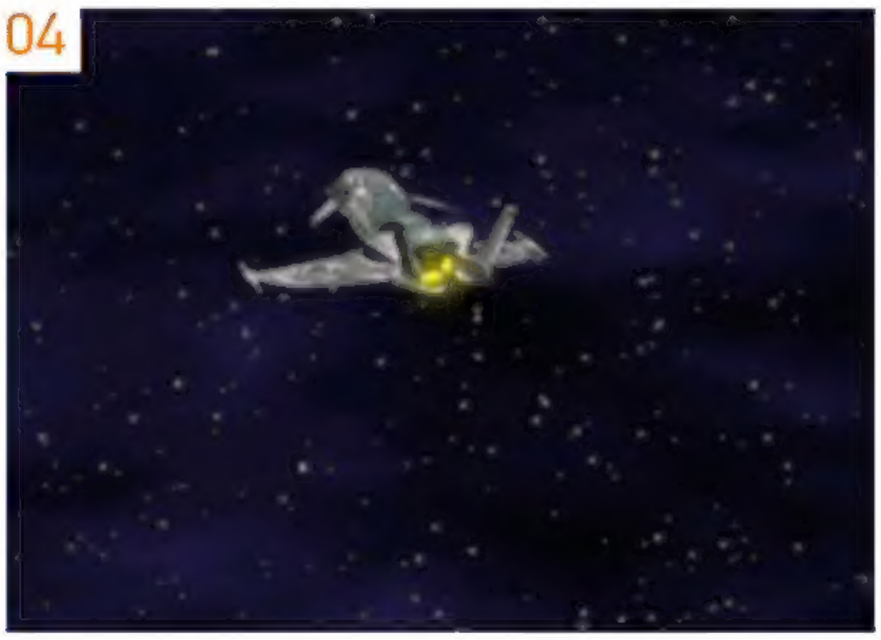
» Excellent! You've made it out into space, where you'll be safe. However you're completely alone, and you've got to return to a planet that has roughly the same long-term prospects the Amiga had when this game came out in 1999.

03



» Reflecting on the events of recent days, you begin to type your thoughts into the ship's log. "What kind of race can destroy its own ship and kill its own people? What kind of race attempts slavery of a new species?"

04

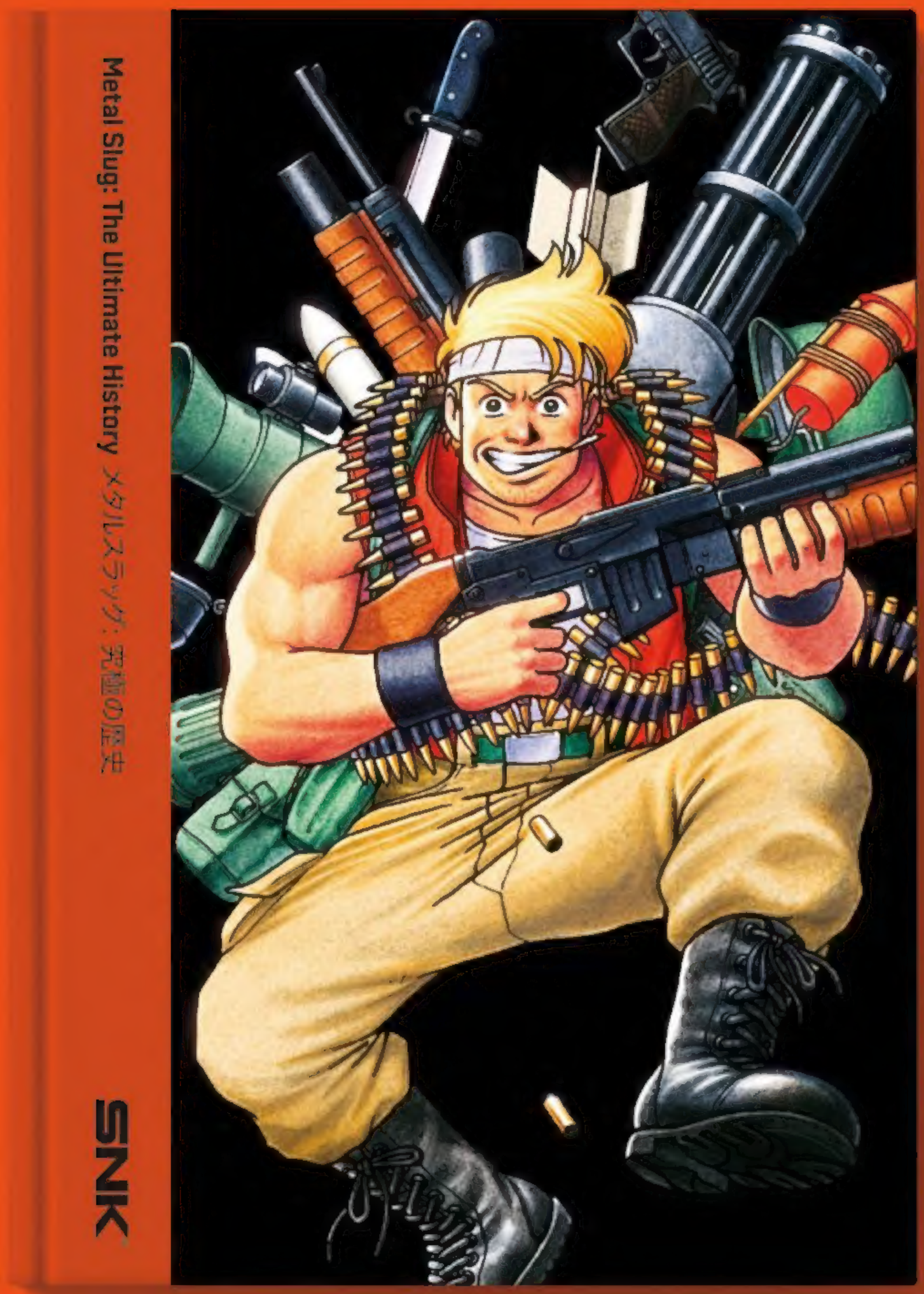


» "And what kind of a race is motivated by greed and aggression? As long as we remain as such, our search for a new home will always be a wasted dream," you lament. You blast off towards home, in order to report the disastrous outcome of the Agillera colonisation project.

05

» So that's humanity for you. The human is a creature capable of such greed that no misdeed is too great – not exploitation, not pollution, not even murder. You dreamed of a brighter future, but we have none. All you got was a lesson in the depths of depravity. Congratulation indeed.

Metal Slug:
The Ultimate History



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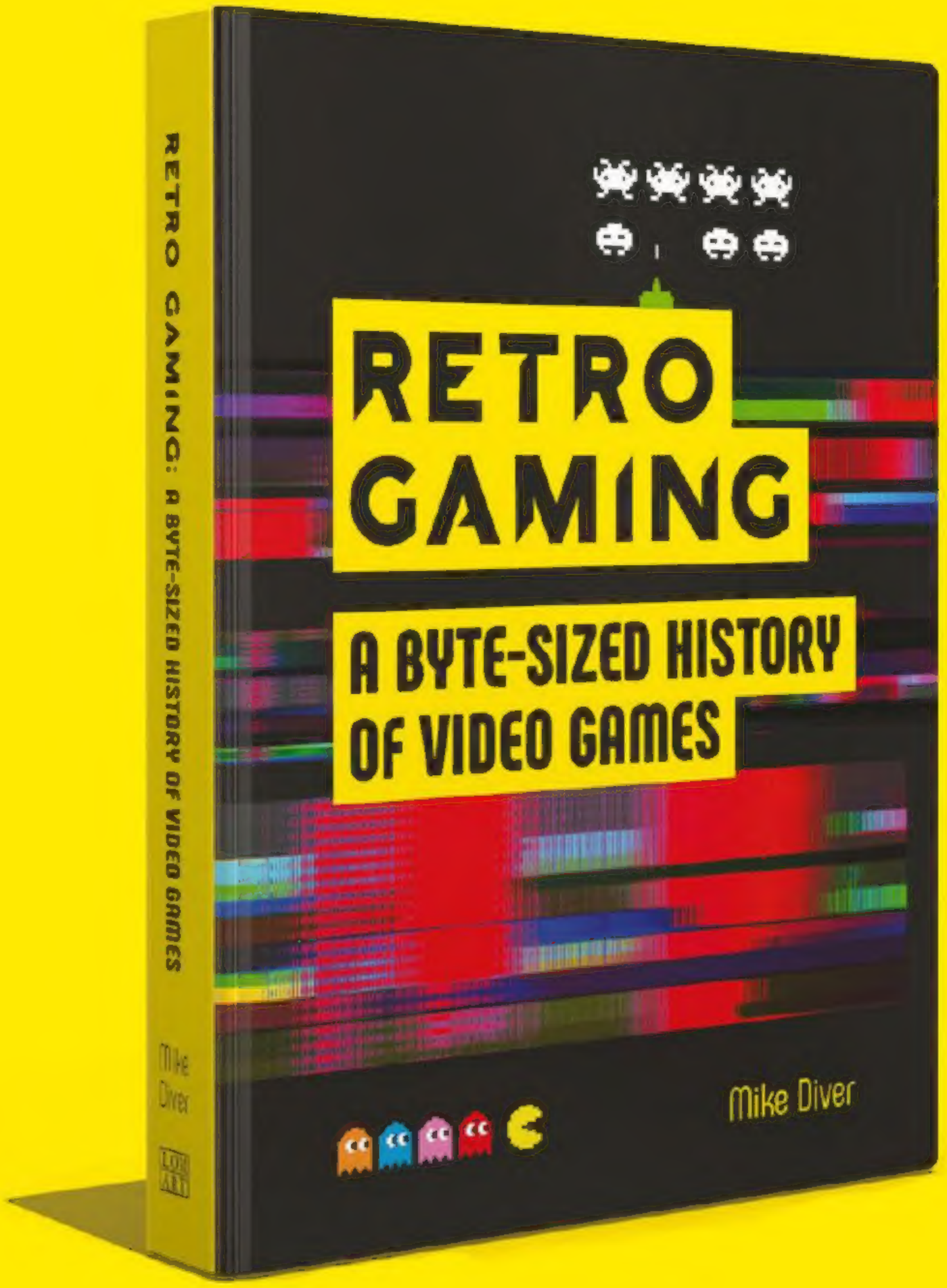

Published on 3rd October 2019 | Hardback | £12.99 | Michael O'Mara Books

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